

Ancient Sexuality

Part Four



Prepared by Robert G. Bedrosian

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Middle East

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A Note on the Study of Homosexuality in the Arab/Islamic Civilization

As'ad AbuKhalil

The field of scholarly research on homosexuality in the Arab/Islamic context has only been superficially explored. Whether in Western languages or in Arabic, the subject has rarely been investigated despite popular interest in it in the Middle East and elsewhere. Among the exceptions are Fatima Mernissi¹ and Abdelwahab Bouhdiba,² who have addressed the subject of homosexuality in the context of their respective studies of sexuality in Islam.³ Recently, a major attempt to study the subject, *Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Muslim Societies*,⁴ was rare in that it treated it in detail. The book, however, was largely anecdotal and lacked scholarly rigor. It also contained some stereotypical depictions of Arab male sexuality, not dissimilar to some references to the subject in classical Orientalist writings.

It has been argued elsewhere that *liwat* should not be translated as homosexuality because homosexual identities were absent in the Arab/Islamic civilization. This argument will be challenged in the course of this brief note on the subject. Originally, the verb *lata* meant to stick to something,⁵ to get very close to an object. The word *liwat* was later used to describe a sexual act between two men, to refer—literally—to the physical intimacy between them. Lesbian sex is described in Arabic as *sihaq* or *musahaqah*.

In writing about the subject, a distinction should be made between attitudes towards homosexuality—and indeed towards sexuality in general—in Arab/Islamic history, and the prevalent attitude towards sexuality in some contemporary Arab societies. In the past, Muslims (from the time of Muhammad onwards) talked about sexuality without inhibitions or moral restraints. We learn from the writings of Al-Jahiz, for example, that Muslim men and women talked explicitly about sexual matters in mosques and during the Hajj, which is something inconceivable today. The Qur'an was quite explicit in some instances about sexual matters, as it said in *surat Al-Baqarah, ayat 223*: "Your women are your tilth: go then into your tilth in any way you wish." This verse was interpreted to sanction a variety of sexual positions during intercourse, while most Shi'ite jurists insisted that it sanctioned vaginal and anal intercourse. Among the Sunni theologians, Imam Malik permitted heterosexual anal intercourse in his *Kitab As-Sirr*.⁶ Some Sunni theologians, however, were adamantly opposed to heterosexual anal intercourse and called the practice *al-liwat al-asghar* (the minor homosexuality).

It should also be noted that Islamic (textual) attitudes to sexuality differ markedly from orthodox Christian or Jewish attitudes. Not only does Islam recognize the sexual desires of both men and women, but it also does not call for their suppression, as is the case in Christian dogma. Female sexuality is recognized, and is in fact exaggerated to a great extent. Thus, theologians warned that if female sexual desire is left unregulated within a marriage, the whole social and political order could collapse (the fear of *al-fitna* that Mernissi has analyzed so adequately). Some writers even used the

appeal of sexuality to lure the believers to the "right path." Al-Ghazzali once said that if Muslims think that sex is pleasurable on earth, they should anticipate its experience in heaven where its duration is not limited in time. The classical Islamic attitudes to sexuality were eroded through contact with non-Muslims who questioned the moral legitimacy of sexual permissiveness in Islam. This led to the abandonment of the classical sexual openness and its replacement with Christian sexual mores.

One should also remember in this context the observation of Hichem Djait with regard to Western attitudes to Islam. Djait rightly criticized the West for its inconsistent attitude towards Islam: in the past, Islam was judged with the yardstick of Christian doctrine, while now Islam is being judged with the yardstick of secular humanism.⁷ Thus, Islam was criticized in medieval Christian polemics for its laxity and permissiveness in sexual matters while today, Islam is criticized for its sexual strictness and conservatism. In fact, what passes in present-day Saudi Arabia, for example, as sexual conservatism is due more to Victorian puritanism than to Islamic mores. It is quite inaccurate to attribute prevailing sexual mores in present-day Arab society to Islam.

Originally, Islam did not have the same harsh Biblical judgement about homosexuality as Christianity. Homophobia, as an ideology of hostility towards people who are homosexual, was produced by the Christian West. Homophobic influences in Arab culture are relatively new, and many were introduced, like anti-Semitism, from Western sources. The Qur'an, which is specific on many social and familial patterns of behavior, has very little to say about homosexuality. In *surat Ash-Shu'ara', ayat 166*, it says: "Will you fornicate (*ata'tuna*) with males and abandon your wives, whom God has created for you? Surely you are great transgressors." Compared to other references in the Qur'an dealing with "ethical" behavior, this verse is quite mild. There is another reference in the Qur'an which contains a double standard for homosexuality among men and women. It states in *surat An-Nisa', ayat 15*: "If any of your women commit *al-fahishah* [not necessarily homosexuality, but here seems to refer to a homosexual relationship] bring in four witnesses from amongst you against them; if they confess, confine them to their houses till death overtakes them or till God finds a way for them. If two men among you commit it [again, the reference is to *al-fahishah*], punish them both. If they repent and mend their ways, let them alone. God is forgiving and merciful."

Later theologians concocted a variety of non-*sahih* *hadiths* to ban the practice, albeit in theory. We find Khumayni, for example, going into details to elaborate on the manner in which a homosexual is to be killed, and this is clearly against the intention of the Qur'an.⁸ He supported killing the homosexual by a sword and then burning his body. Another method that he favored is throwing

As'ad AbuKhalil is Assistant Professor of Political Science at California State University, Stanislaus and Research Associate at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of California at Berkeley.

the homosexual man, with his hands and feet tied, from atop a mountain. According to Khumayni, "the homosexual crime has the worst possible effects on society."⁹ In fact, there was no consensus traditionally among the jurists. German orientalist Adam Mez states that most of them believed that there were no *hudud* applicable to pederasty.

Homosexual advocates in Arab/Islamic history (known as *ahl al-liwat*) took comfort in the Qur'anic references to *ghilman* (young men, usually—certainly in the classical Arabic literary tradition—objects of male sexual desire). In describing life in heaven, it said in the Qur'an: "and there shall wait on them young boys (*ghilman*) of their own, as fair as virgin pearls" (*surat At-Tur*, *ayat* 24). In *surat Al-Waqi'ah*, *ayats* 17-18, it said: "[A]nd there shall wait on them immortal youths (*wildan*) with bowls and ewers and a cup of purest wine that will neither pain their heads nor take away their reason." These references were the evidence for Islamic religious toleration of male homosexuality, so argued *Ahl Al-Liwat*. The same references also often appeared in Christian medieval polemics against Islam. Christians were alarmed by such depictions which constituted, in the eyes of Christian critics, a recipe for free sex.

In tracing the origins of contemporary Arab attitudes towards homosexuality, one is struck by the openness and bluntness that characterized early Islamic writings on sexual mores. Thus, it was not uncommon for Muhammad's companions to share with him their sexual experience with their wives. 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab once told the Prophet that he was too tired (*haliktu*) because he had a long night of sex with his wife where he was situated behind her. In response, the verse from *surat Al-Baqarah* cited earlier was revealed to the Prophet, permitting a variety of sexual positions. Al-Jahiz introduced his *Kitab Mufakharat Al-Jawari wa-l-Ghulman* (A Book of the Debate Comparing the Virtues of [sex with] Women and Young Men)¹⁰ by reminding the reader of the ease with which early companions of the Prophet discussed details of sexuality. Muhammad, according to various *hadith* collections, never made his love for women a secret. And Imam Ibn Qutaybah began his classic *'Uyun Al-Akhbar* by assuring the reader that there is no harm in mentioning sexual organs or sexual acts. Real harm, he added, lies in cheating and lying.

The classic books of *At-Turath* (heritage) and works in Islamic jurisprudence constitute the major sources for the study of homosexuality.¹¹ A study of the *Turath* would refute the views in Schmidt's and Sofer's book. It is untrue that only bisexuality exists—or has existed—in the region, because there is—and has been—such a thing as a pure homosexual identity there. The professed homosexual identity among Arabs allowed homosexuals historically a degree of tolerance that was denied for centuries to homosexuals in the West. When homosexuals were hunted down as criminals in much of Medieval Europe, homosexuals were rulers and ministers in Islamic countries. The Abbasid Caliph Al-Wathiq, for example, devoted his life and poetry to his male lover Muhaj.¹² The Caliph Al-Amin, according to As-Suyuti in *Tarikh Al-Khulafa'*, simply "rejected women and concubines."¹³ He refused, despite the strenuous efforts of his mother, to have sex with women. "To cure

her son of his passion for eunuchs the mother of the Caliph Amin smuggled among them several slender, handsome maids with short hair dressed up as boys in tight jackets and girdles. Court circles and common-folk all alike followed this fashion and similarly dressed-up their slave-girls and called them *Ghulamiyyah*."¹⁴ Earlier in the Umayyad period, the Caliph Al-Walid bin Yazid was known for "wine and *at-talawwut* [engaging in *liwat*]."¹⁵ On the *ghulamiyyat*, Abu Nuwwas said "I was tortured by the love of the *ghulamiyyat*...and they are suitable for homosexuals (*latah*) and promiscuous heterosexuals (*zunat*)."¹⁶ And while some writers on sexuality treat the distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality as artificial, there were examples from the Arab/Islamic civilization of leaders, poets, and judges who clearly expressed a pure homosexual identity. On the assertion of a homosexual identity, Abu Nuwwas said "would I choose seas over land? (in Abu Nuwwas' poetry, seas denoted love of women, and lands [*barari*] denoted love of men)...this is what the book of God commanded us, to favor males over females."¹⁷

One should not, however, give a false impression about the status of homosexuals in the Arab/Islamic history. After the death of the Prophet, there were a few rare cases in which homosexuals were killed. In *Sunan* of Ibn Majah, a *hadith* was attributed to the Prophet in which he reportedly said: "He whom you find doing the deed of the Lot's People, kill *al-fa'il wa-l-maf'ul bihi* (the doer and the one being done unto)." Homophobic leaders in Islamic history included 'Ali Bin Abi Talib (who once threw a homosexual—with his head pointing down—from atop a minaret, saying: "This is how he will dumped in the fire of hell"), Abu Bakr (who ordered the burning of homosexuals), and Khalid ibn al-Walid. Nevertheless, homosexuals continued to exist and were generally tolerated.

We know more about homosexual life today because some previously unpublished manuscripts are now being published in scholarly editions. Of course, Muslims always circulated *sha'bi* (popular) editions of much of the celebrated Arab erotica. One publisher based in London and Beirut, Riad El-Rayyes, has published three major works of Arab erotica: *Al-Rawd Al-'Atir fi Nuzhat Al-Khatir* (known in the West as *The Perfumed Garden*), *Tuhfat Al-'Arus was Mut'at An-Nufus*, and *Nuzhat Al-Albab fima la Yujad fi Kitab*. These works contain collections of poetry and anecdotes by and about gay men and women. Their poetry is explicit and would be considered obscene by Christian moral standards. The idea that there were no self-declared lesbians (*suhaqiyyat*) or gay men is false. Commenting on the prevalence of gay men and lesbian women, Muhammad bin Zakariyyah Ar-Razi said in one article: "You might find males as women and females as men."¹⁸ There were some who preached the virtues of homosexuality and were called *ghulat al-latah* (literally, ultra homosexuals).

The literary heritage is full of passages in poetry and prose used by advocates of homosexuality and heterosexuality against one another.¹⁹ In the 10th century A.D. in the Muslim World, "of love-songs there are as many addressed to boys as to girls."²⁰ Advocates of homosexuality pointed to homosexual references in the professed heterosexual works of literature. The beauty of a woman was often compared to the beauty of a young man. In praise

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of young men as objects of sexual desire, one poet declared: "I sacrificed for you, you were chosen deliberately/because *li-annaka la tahidu wa la tabidu* (you do not menstruate or ovulate)." ²¹ Critics of homosexuality, on the other hand, insisted that heterosexuality is religiously obligatory.

The free practice of sexuality was not, contrary to the writings on the subject, confined to men. There were many women who practiced free love and free sex. Ibn Bassam cites one line of poetry by Walladah bint Al-Mustakfi in his classic *Adh-Dhakhirah Fi Mahasin Ahl Al-Jazirah*: "I give my cheek to whoever loves me/ and I give my kiss to anybody who desires it." ²² Ibn Bassam criticizes Walladah for "flaunting her pleasures." Much of the poetry by Walladah (in praise of her female lover poetess Muhjah) was lost because most authors refused to cite them due to their explicit sexual language. ²³ There are episodes in the *turath* in which men tolerated lesbian love. One man was told that his wife was *tusahiq* (having sex with other women), and he responded: "As long as she frees me from any sexual obligation towards her let her do what she wants." ²⁴ One poetess declared: "I drank wine for love of flirting/and I shifted towards lesbianism for fear of pregnancy." ²⁵

The advent of westernization in the Middle East brought with it various elements of western ideologies of hostility, like anti-Semitism and homophobia. This is not to say that there were not anti-homosexual (or anti-Jewish) elements in Arab/Islamic history, but these elements never constituted an ideology of hostility as such. Furthermore, Muslims have been trying since the last century to live up to the western moral code. Islamic thinkers wanted to conform sexual and moral mores to western (primarily Christian) codes of behavior. The modern Arab state enacted legislation against homosexuals in most instances, although the victims (as rare as they are) are always poor Muslims who are prosecuted as examples of the state's ability to reach the citizen in his/her privacy. In some Arab countries, like the United Arab Emirates, marriages between males take place regularly. There are still some, like Amin 'Abdallah Al-Gharib who wrote a pamphlet on the Islamic attitude to homosexuality and masturbation, who blame the West for the very existence of homosexuality. This Al-Gharib believes that the spread of VCRs explains the practice of homosexuality among Arab men. ²⁶ In other words, Arabs are introduced to practices that were alien to them through the imported video cassettes, according to Al-Gharib. In addition, there are some Arab writers who under the macho influence of Arab nationalism asserted, misusing Adam Mez, that homosexuality was alien to the Arabs until it was brought to them by the Persians! ²⁷

The rise of Islamic fundamentalism could pose a threat to homosexuals, although Islamic jurists throughout Arab/Islamic history did not preoccupy themselves with this issue. But elements of Christian and Jewish fundamentalism could influence Islamic fundamentalism because Christianity and Judaism are far more intolerant towards homosexuals than Islam. Shaykh 'Umar 'Abdul-Rahman, for example, seems to be unusual in his harping on the evils of homosexuality. This could be due to his exposure to the discourse of Christian fundamentalism in the U.S.

The modern state has also contributed to homophobia by referring to homosexuality as *shudhudh jinsi* (literally, sexual perversion). The term was never used in Arab/Islamic history and it carries the moral position of the Christian faith. Moreover, ignorance about AIDS in the Arab World has allowed some writers in Egypt—

and elsewhere in the Arab world—to propagate the myth that all AIDS cases in the Arab World were caused by Mossad agents who were sent to corrupt and destroy the Muslim youths. Thus, homophobic theologians in the Arab World are associating the spread of AIDS, with complete disregard to scientific evidence, with the very practice of homosexuality. Furthermore, the attribution of AIDS cases in the Arab World by some Egyptian theologians to a western/Zionist conspiracy is intended to discredit and ostracize known homosexuals in society. The homosexual becomes, in the mind of the modern ideology of Islamic homophobia, a man with a double condemnation: first, for being immoral for engaging in illicit sex and, secondly, for betraying the *umma* by serving as the tool of the enemy. Not unlike what is customary in Arab political discourse, the distinction between violation of the sexual norms and the violation of the political norms are obscured. After all, the Arab defeat in 1948 continues to be referred to in Arab poetry and prose as the "rape of Palestine." ²⁸

In conclusion, the study of the subject should distinguish between past sexual mores in the region and the prevalent value system today, which has been affected by interaction with the West. The modern state has also influenced and changed the moral code of the population through new legislation and through control of the press and other media of popular culture. The task remains for scholars to study the subject with knowledge and sensitivity. Homosexuals cannot—and should not—be the main preoccupation of homophobic minds. The neglect of the subject in Islamic/Middle Eastern studies can be attributed to homophobic tendencies in academic circles. Just as the taboo against studying Arab women has been lifted, the taboo against studying Arab homosexuals should also be lifted.

Footnotes

¹ See Sabbabah, Fatma, *Women in the Muslim Unconscious*, (New York: Pergamon Press, 1984). The identity of Mernissi as the author of this book was revealed in a book review.

² See his *La Sexualite en Islam*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979).

³ The reference to "slavery in Islam" and to "sexuality in Islam" does not really make sense because it treats Muslims as unchanging through the passage of time. It also ignores the significant cultural and social differences in societies where the majority of people are Muslims. Of course, Mernissi and Bouhdiba are far more sophisticated than those writers who assumed the timelessness in the life of Muslims.

⁴ Schmidt, Arno and Jehoeda Sofer, eds., *Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Muslim Societies*, (New York: Haworth Press, 1992).

⁵ See volume 5 of *Fiqh Al-Imam Ja'far As-Sadiq*, edited by Muhammad Jawad Mughniyyah, (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm li-l-Malayin, 1966).

⁶ See the interesting study by Jamal Jum'ah, "Al-'Irotikiyyah Al-'Arabiyyah: Baynas-Sath wa-l-Oa'," [Arab Eroticism: Between the Surface and the Bottom], in Jum'ah, Jamal, ed., *Nuzhat Al-Albab fi Ma La Yujad fi Kitab*, (Beirut and London: Riad El-Rayyes Books Ltd., 1992), p. 31.

⁷ See Djait, Hichem, *L'Europe et l'Islam*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978).

⁸ See Khumayni, *Tahrir al-Wasilah*, vol. 2, (Beirut: Matbu'at al-Thawrah al-Thaqafiyyah al-Islamiyyah, 1981). Also see Mutahhari Ahmad, *Mustanad Tahrir al-Wasilah*, (Qum: Mu'assasat al-Nashr al-Islami, 1404 A.H.).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ This *risalah* by Al-Jahiz has been published in several scholarly editions. I am referring to the edition by the eminent Al-Jahiz expert, French orientalist Charles Pellat, *Kitab Mufakharat Al-Jawari wa-l-Ghulman*, (Beirut: Dar Al-Makshuf, 1957).

¹¹ The weakness in the article by Dunne, Bruce W., "Homosexuality in the Middle East: An Agenda for Historical Research," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 3 & 4, (Summer/ Fall 1990) lies in his total reliance on English and French sources. For

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brokers. Roberts then showed how the use of alliances led the Algerian Islamists into a strategy of political opportunism, which opened them up to manipulation.

The fourth panel was entitled "Re-reading and Re-imagining in Muslim Thought." Dr. Khalifa Chater, in his paper "A New Reading of the Maghrebi Islamic Texts from the 19th to Early 20th Century: A Lay Movement or a Religious Reform?," discussed the many *fatwas* of the pre-colonial era. He asserted that by bringing a number of 'Ulama into the exclusive service of the state, a process of secularization took place in the *Maghreb*, even though this was never claimed and the language of the state maintained its traditional religious nature. In the other paper on the panel, "Re-imagining Religion and Politics in Morocco," Dr. Dale Eickelman discussed how King Hassan of Morocco has been able to legitimate his rule through the manipulation of political and religious imagination and discourse. In his discussion of wider trends in the Arab world, such as mass higher education which is reshaping Arab society on a large scale, he also discussed the re-imagining of national identity in the region. In concluding, Eickelman asserted that democracy must be seen in incremental terms and Islamic activism must be seen as a sign of wider transformations within the society.

The final panel commenced with Dr. Michael Dunn's discussion of the history of, and the different trends within, the Islamic movement in Tunisia in his paper "Renaissance or Revolution? The Al-Nahda Movement, Islam and Politics in Tunisia." Dunn believes that the April 1989 elections, in which Al-Nahda was not allowed to run as a political party, were a turning point in the history of the movement, because this led many Islamists to the realization that they could not come to power from within the system. Dunn stated that the fact that Al-Nahda leader Rashid Gannouchi left Tunisia in self-imposed exile after the elections proves that he opted for a revolutionary rather than an incrementalist approach.

Emad Eldin Shahin began his paper, entitled "Secularism and Nationalism: The Political Ideas of Abd al-Salam Yassin," by explaining that religion must be seen as an ideological force in its own right. With this in mind, he asserted that the Islamic revival cannot be explained within a secular framework. He then proceeded to discuss the life and thought of Abd al-Salam Yassin, the chief ideologue of the mainstream Islamic movement in Morocco. The speaker described how Yassin, a Berber, was well-educated in both Islamic and Western ideas and culture. The Islamic leader, who has been under house arrest since 1989, maintains a critical approach to the modernization model, rejecting the secular forms of linguistic and ethnic nationalism as well as the marginalization of Islam in nationalist thought. Shahin contended that while the Islamic movement in Morocco is currently not a threat to the regime, the situation could change in the future, especially in the instance of a dispute over succession to the throne.

In the last paper of the symposium, "Militant Islam and its Critics: The Case of Libya," Dr. Marius Deeb discussed possible reasons why Libya has not witnessed a militant Islamic movement. First, the Islamic legacy of the Sufi Sanussiyya movement has not been congenial to the rise of activist Islamist thought in the country. Second, the fragmented socio-economic structure in pre-colonial Libya, in both rural and urban areas, has hindered the rise of Islamism. Third, the political and economic reform policies pur-

sued by Qadhdhafi have not bridged gaps between the classes, but have rather frozen them into a situation in which there is no mobility. Meanwhile, the absence of both serious poverty and a monolithic political structure has prevented the conditions in which militant movements usually thrive. Dr. Deeb continued by discussing Qadhdhafi's views on politics and religion. From 1969 to 1974 he called for the implementation of *shari'a* and the replacement of all positive law, while from 1975 to 1981 he became a functioning secularist calling for a separation of the mundane from the religious. According to Deeb, these developments caught the Islamists off guard. Furthermore, the National Front for the Salvation of Libya, the largest opposition group, has been forced to defend the 'Ulama as a reaction to Qadhdhafi's strong anti-clerical positions, and thus has been able to upstage other, more Islamist-oriented, opposition groups.

In summation, the symposium provided scholars of North Africa with a wealth of information and theories on important issues which will certainly continue to be discussed. The symposium also proved that the issue of the rise of Islamist-oriented political thought and action continues to provoke lively debate and requires further study if scholars are to come to a deeper and more accurate understanding of the phenomenon.

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that reason, he fell into the fallacy of denying the existence of homosexual identity in the region. Furthermore, his use of translated books by Najib Mahfudh can not be reliable in this instance because Mahfudh is a contemporary writer who was exposed to the Western ideology of homophobia. He was also inaccurate in talking about a "cultural taboo" against homosexuality in Arab society. Intolerance towards homosexuals in the Arab World is far less severe than the prevalent violent manifestation of homophobia in Western societies.

¹² See the biographical sketch of him in As-Suyuti, *Tarikh Al-Khulafa'* [History of the Caliphs], (Cairo: Ahmad Al-Babi Al Halabi, 1305 A.H.), pp. 135-137.

¹³ Ibid., p. 118.

¹⁴ Mez, Adam, *Die Renaissance Des Islams*, trans. by Slahduddin Khuda Bukhsh and D.S. Margoliouth, (London: Luzac & Co., 1937), p. 357.

¹⁵ As-Suyuti, p. 97.

¹⁶ Abu Nuwwas, *Diwan Abi Nuwwas*, (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1962), p. 116.

¹⁷ Abu Nuwwas, p. 130.

¹⁸ Cited in At-Tifashi, Shihab Ad-Kin, *Nuzhat Al-Albab fima La Yujad fi Kitab*, (Beirut and London: Riad El-Rayyes, 1992), p. 303.

¹⁹ An interesting collection is Al-Jahiz' letter cited above.

²⁰ Mez, p. 358.

²¹ Cited in Al-Jahiz, p. 25.

²² I am referring to the first edition of the book published in Cairo by Fu'ad I University in 1939, Part I, vol. 1, p. 379.

²³ On Walladah Hoenerbach, W., see "Zur Charakteristik Walladas, der Geliebten Ibn Zayduns," *Die Welt des Islams*, 13 (1971).

²⁴ Cited in Tifashi, p. 242.

²⁵ Reported in al-Jahiz, cited above.

²⁶ See his *Nadhrat Al-Islam Ila-l-Liwat wa-l-'Istimna'* [The Outlooks of Islam Towards Homosexuality and Masturbation], (Beirut: *Mu'assasat Al-A'la*, Second Edition, 1989), pp. 16-17.

²⁷ It was odd that such a brilliant scholar like Hichem Djait would also believe in this myth. See Djait, Hichem, *La Personnalité et le devenir Arabo-Islamiques*, (Paris: *Editions du Seuil*, 1974), ch. 5, section 2. Djait was quite inaccurate in attributing the myth of Khurasani origins of homosexuality among the Arabs to Adam Mez. Mez traced the myth to "Muslim tradition" without ever commenting on its validity. See Mez, p. 358.

²⁸ I have benefitted from the insights of Joseph Mas'ad's mimeographed study of the gender question and Palestinian nationalism.



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FORMAL FRIENDSHIP IN THE MEDIEVAL NEAR EAST

SHELOMO D. GOITEIN

Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton

(Read April 23, 1971)

FRIENDSHIP as a social institution and spiritual bond, and not merely as a more or less passing human relationship, was known to various civilizations. From the Bible we might remember that King David had an official companion styled "friend of the king," and so did his son King Solomon.¹ Their eldest sons, the crown princes, too, had their official friends whom they consulted in difficult hours.² The friendship between David and Jonathan, the son of King Saul, is to be understood against this background. Jonathan, the crown prince, chose David as his permanent companion, because, as the Bible says, he loved him as his own self,³ an expression echoed in the writings of the Greeks, and later the Arabs. Jonathan, the Bible tells us, stripped himself of his robe, his armor, his belt, and his sword, and put all this on David. Jonathan's attire represented his personality. By donning it, David became Jonathan, the two fused into one. This formal act of the conclusion of a friendship had a name. It was designated by the term "covenant," *berit*, the same word that the Bible uses for the bond between husband and wife.⁴

Besides this formally concluded friendship between two individuals the Bible knows of groups bound together by ecstasy and prophetic rapture induced by music. We read about them in the stories of Samuel and Saul. The procedure of initiation into the group was the opposite of what we have just met with in personal friendship. The novice was expected to be carried away by the enthusiasm of the group, to be seized by the spirit, until he forgot himself and threw off all his

clothing, piece after piece, and stood naked among the prophesiers day and night; in other words, he divested himself of his individuality, he became one with the group and was possessed by the spirit.⁵

Within the group there was room for formal *personal* friendship, namely between master and disciple, between the leader of the group and his prospective successor. The First Book of Kings tells us that the future prophet Elisha originally was a farmer, himself ploughing his fields and supervising the work of his farmhands when the prophet Elijah, as was his habit, appeared suddenly and cast his mantle upon him, meaning, as in the case of David and Jonathan, that the two had become one.⁶ A similar act was performed in the Biblical wedding: the bridegroom spread his robe, or rather the skirt of his robe, over his future life-companion, symbolizing what is written in the Book of Genesis: "They become one flesh."⁷

I have presented the Biblical material on formal friendship in some detail because, as we recognize today more and more, it is illustrative of the ancient Near East in general. The medieval Near East, the one dominated by Islam, was an extremely complex and diversified civilization inasmuch as it absorbed the traditions not only of the ancient Near East, but those of the Greeks and, of course, the pre-Islamic Arabian nomads as well. The social history of this civilization, formerly somewhat neglected, has aroused much interest during the last two decades. Formal friendship, by which I mean a fixed, lasting, and strongly emotional relationship cutting through the bonds of family, clan, or tribe, and mostly called *ṣuhba* in Arabic, was a typical phenomenon of this Near Eastern medieval civilization, tinged by Islam.

In this paper I shall try to study this institution as it was practiced among the common people. For such an undertaking we have an excellent source in the documents of the so-called Cairo

¹ David's friend: 1 Chronicles 27: 33, in a list of officials and dignitaries. In 2 Samuel 15: 37, and 16: 16-17, conceived as a friend owing special allegiance. Solomon's friend: 1 Kings 4: 5. This "friend" was a son of the prophet Nathan to whom Solomon owed his throne.

² Amnon, the firstborn of David: 2 Samuel 13: 3. Rehoboam, son of Solomon: 1 Kings 12:8. His friends became his servants who "stood before him."

³ 1 Samuel 18: 3 See *ibid.* 18: 1-4.

⁴ Malachi 2: 14.

⁵ 1 Samuel 10: 5-6, and 19: 20-24.

⁶ 1 Kings 19: 19-21.

⁷ Genesis 2: 24. See Ruth 3: 9.

Geniza,⁸ a treasure trove of manuscripts written mostly during the tenth through the thirteenth centuries and found originally in Old Cairo. At that time Old Cairo was the hub of the Islamic world. The Mediterranean and the India trades converged there.⁹ Therefore, the Geniza contains information about major sections of the medieval Near East. The writers and recipients of these letters and documents were mostly, albeit not exclusively, Jewish. But most of the material is written in the Arabic language, and, as the terms used prove, the social notions expressed in it, were, as a rule, not specific to any particular group, but belonged to the general environment of the writers concerned.

The unique value of this material for the historian consists, of course, in its documentary character; it represents life, unlike books, where the personality of the author, his knowledge, aims, and capacities come between reality and the reader.

Before trying, however, to discuss what the Geniza tells us about formal friendship, I must survey, if only in the very barest outline, what Arabic literature has to teach us about the subject, so that the Geniza material may be seen in its proper perspective.

Friendship was of little import in the heroic age of the Arabs, in pre-Islamic Arabia. Pre-Islamic poetry contains some noble verses on friendship,¹⁰ but we would look in it in vain for

a pair like Achilles and Patroclus, on whose brotherly love the whole story of the Trojan war was geared.

We learn about the social institution of the boon companions, *nadīm*, mostly two, who shared the revelries of a poet or hero and served also as his lookouts and guards on his amorous nightly adventures.¹¹ These two boon companions are mentioned, however, most prominently in stories about the Arab kings of Hira, who were under Persian domination.¹² Thus it is likely that the *nadīm*, together with the wine and the singing girls, came to the Arabs from Persia, where, as we shall presently see, the ancient Near Eastern institution of the friends of the kings had remained fully alive.

The negligible role of friendship in pre-Islamic Arabia is to be explained by the preeminence of the bonds of blood and kinship. Or, as the Arab poet has explained it:

Take for your friend whom you will in the days of peace. But know that when fighting comes your kinsman alone is near.¹³

Formal friendship, *ṣuḥba*, came into the Arab world with religion, with the Islam of Muhammad. Conversion was conceived as a personal bond between the new believer and the founder of the religion. It was symbolized by a handclasp, the joining of hands by which the ancient Arabs used to confirm a contract or a covenant. Muhammad's adherents were called his friends or com-

⁸ Pronounced *ghenceza*. About the Cairo Geniza as a source for social history see S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967) 1: pp. 1-28, 395-400.

⁹ For the Mediterranean trade see *A Mediterranean Society* 1: pp. 148-352, 437-490. A collection of three hundred and forty documents from the Cairo Geniza related to the India trade is being prepared for publication. A preliminary report in S. D. Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden, 1966), pp. 329-360.

¹⁰ I found this pair of verses rather impressive:

"Make friends with noble men,
If you can find a way to their friendship.
And drink out of their cup,
Even if it is poison right down to the dregs."

T. Nöldeke, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der Poesie der alten Araber* (Hanover, 1864), p. 79, calls this "ein herrliches Verspaar." The poet happened to be Jewish, but there was no substantial difference between Jewish and pagan pre-Islamic poets. The term for concluding a friendship, used here twice, is *ikhā'*, literally, "taking as brother," see note 14, below.

¹¹ The institution of the boon companions was so well established that many a poem would open with an address in the dual number to two anonymous persons. The most famous case is, of course, the Mu'allāqa, or prize poem, of Imru'u l-Qays, the father of pre-Islamic poetry, whose introductory phrase *qifā nabkī*, "you two, stand still, let us cry," has become a catchword for classical, outmoded poetry to the young Arab today.

¹² The first such pair were the two companions of Jadhīma, a vassal of Ardāshīr, the founder of the Sasanid dynasty, see R. A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (Cambridge, 1956 [reprint]), pp. 34-35. The interesting point in this story is that Jadhīma originally had been too proud to admit anyone to his drinking bouts except two stars, which implies, of course, that the two boon companions had been a long-established institution. The most illustrious (and notorious) king of Hira, Mundhir III (sixth century), ordered his two boon companions to be buried alive. The ceremonies performed at their tombstones gave rise to a famous story of a pair of pre-Islamic heroes, see R. A. Nicholson, *A Literary History*, pp. 43-44.

¹³ *Hamāsa of Abū Tammām*, ed. G. Freytag (Bonn, 1828 ff.), p. 327. See also R. A. Nicholson, *Literary History*, p. 84.

panions, *aṣḥāb*, or, in relationship to each other, brothers, *ikhwān*.¹⁴

From that time on, spiritual bonds of the greatest variety became the base of sustained personal relationships transcending family attachments, the strongest being those connected with Islamic mysticism known as Sufism. According to the developed theory of Sufism only a specific and lasting relationship with one single master can initiate a novice properly into the Path of Truth. It cannot be learned from books, nor by changing from one master to another.¹⁵ The most sublime stage of this relationship is the self-effacement of the disciple in his master, as when Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, the greatest mystical poet writing in the Persian language, concluded his poems not with his own pen name, but with that of his master.¹⁶ The two symbolic acts of initiation practiced by the ancient prophets of Israel, namely, the clothing of the novice with the mantle of the master and, conversely, the throwing away of all clothing in the ecstasy induced by music, were most prominent features of Sufi life, but there is no historical connection between these *ancient* Near Eastern and *medieval* Near Eastern practices.

The matter was different with regard to another type of formal friendship, the friends of the kings. The Persian dynasty of the Sasanids continued this ancient institution, similarly to what the Hellenistic rulers and Roman emperors had done before. The Muslim ideas about kingship were largely molded by the Sasanid heritage, wherefore the problem of the friends of the kings is copiously ventilated in Islamic literature.¹⁷ In a most remarkable mem-

orandum submitted to Manṣūr, the second Abbasid caliph (754-775), called "Book of Companionship," a Persian nobleman, Ibn al-Muqaffa', surveys the types of persons who should become a caliph's intimates. I have discussed this memorandum in my book *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* under the title "A Turning-point in the History of the Muslim State." "Turning-point," because it was not the aristocrats recommended by Ibn al-Muqaffa', but the technocrats so much more needed by the Muslim state of those days who finally became the caliph's confidants.¹⁸

A third source for thought on friendship in Islam was Greek philosophy and rhetorics which reached the Arabs in many different ways. The most detailed exposition of the topic is found in Miskawayh's book named "Training of the Character," the classical and most influential treatise on Islamic ethics. Man is by nature a social being. Consequently, his intrinsic and highest destination, spiritual perfection, can be reached only through association with a congenial friend.¹⁹

It is a law of sociology that notions alive in the upper classes filter down in the course of time and through adequate transformation to the broader masses of the population. As the writings of the Cairo Geniza show, it was not different with the idea of *ṣuḥba*. Terms coined for the description of this relationship by religion, statecraft, or philosophy, became part and parcel of the daily speech of the common people. *Ṣuḥba* itself became a most important institution; it was indeed the organizational backbone of international trade.

¹⁴ "The true-believers are brothers," Koran 49: 10. Also 9: 12. In order to emphasize that the new brotherhood of religion cut through the bonds of tribal allegiance, the prophet Muhammad concluded formal brotherhood between each Muslim member of his own tribe and one of the Muslims of Medina, to where he emigrated. This was called *ikhā'*, see n. 10, above, and n. 22, below.

¹⁵ An idea to be found in many works on Sufism, especially in the concluding chapter of al-Qushayrī's *Risāla*, which is superscribed: "Instruction for the Novice."

¹⁶ See now the important article "Djalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī" by H. Ritter and A. Bausani in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (second edition, Leiden, 1965) 2: pp. 393-397. This self-effacement of the great poet in his master, an almost obscure man, is the more remarkable as recent discoveries have proved how deeply Jalāl ad-Dīn was indebted to his own father, an outstanding author. See A. J. Arberry, "Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī," *Islamic Studies* 1 (Karachi, 1962): pp. 89-105.

¹⁷ Our knowledge of Sasanian history is derived to a very large extent from Islamic sources. This fact makes

research in the Iranian influence on Islam extremely complicated, or, as G. E. von Grunebaum has put it: "In some ways, the Persian components of Islamic civilization are more difficult to separate out than the Hellenic precisely because they are more fully integrated and have become effective on so many levels." *The Cambridge History of Islam* (Cambridge, 1970) 2: p. 501.

¹⁸ S. D. Goitein, *Studies* (see n. 9), pp. 149-167. See "Ibn al-Muqaffa'" in *Enc. of Islam*² (1968) 3: pp. 883-885, by F. Gabrieli.

¹⁹ *Tahdhīb al-Akhlaq*, ed. C. K. Zurayk (Beirut 1967), who provided also an English translation (Beirut, 1968). French translation by Mohammed Arkoun, *Miskawayh, Traité d'Éthique* (Damascus, 1969). See also: M. Arkoun, *Contribution à l'étude de l'humanisme arabe au iv^e/xe siècle: Miskawayh, philosophe et historien* (Paris, 1970). A contemporary of Miskawayh, at-Tawhīdī, wrote a treatise on friendship, which is deeply influenced by Greek thinking. An excellent study of it is found in Marc Bergé, "Une Anthologie sur l'amitié d'Abū Ḥayyān at-Tawhīdī," *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 16 (Institut Français de Damas, Damascus, 1961), pp. 15-58.

Let me explain. Because of the enormous risks involved, people normally partook in many different business ventures simultaneously. Above and beyond these, however, any respectable trader had a *ṣāḥib*, or friend, on the other side of the sea who acted for him not merely as legal and business representative, but as his confidant in every respect. The list of services to be rendered by a *ṣāḥib* was interminable. I have drawn up such a list, a rather longish one, in my book *A Mediterranean Society*, Volume I, but it could still be expanded. The *ṣuḥba* was formally concluded and formally dissolved, and the words used in the correspondence were terms of friendship rather than of business. Often the *ṣuḥba* was based on a relationship of master and disciple, that is, a fledgling overseas trader left his home town, worked for some years under the guidance of an established merchant overseas, and, in gratitude for this education, as it was called, became his *ṣāḥib* after his return to his native city. In the India trade, every consignment sent to a *ṣāḥib* was accompanied by presents, as appropriate between friends. Since this custom was not practiced in the Mediterranean trade, it must have been learned by the Muslims and Jews from the Indians.²⁰

A particular type of commercial friendship was the institution of the travel companion, *rafiq*, mentioned in numerous documents and letters, but not yet sufficiently investigated with regard to its origins and history. People endeavored to travel in groups, large or small, but each individual traveler was specifically connected with another one by far-reaching bonds of mutual responsibility. Each was supposed to know the sums of money and description of goods carried by the other, to look after him in the frequent cases of illness or other mishaps, and to take care of his possessions after his death. The thirteenth-century Spanish Muslim writer Ibn Sa'īd takes it for granted that a traveler would be imprisoned, beaten, and tortured when his *rafiq* died, because the local authorities would assume that the latter had left money with him.²¹ A Yemenite Jew, writing from Jerusalem

at the beginning of the same century, reports indeed that the government had confiscated all the belongings of his dead travel companion and that he was in great fear because of this.²² I have not found in the Geniza a contract on travel companionship and do not expect to find one, for it was a relationship of personal confidence comparable to the *ṣuḥba*, not a legal obligation—despite the disastrous legal consequences it could sometimes have for a surviving *rafiq*.

In order to illustrate the intimate character of the commercial *ṣuḥba*, I reproduce here a passage from a letter written around 1020 in Qayrawān, then the capital of the country known today as Tunisia, by a merchant and communal leader to his correspondent in Cairo who had broken with him:

I am writing to you my elder—may God protect you from what one fears and grant you what makes one happy—at the end of the month of Av [July/August when the last ships of the season sailed for Egypt.] I am sound in body, but sore in mind because of the absence of your letters, and because you neglect me and turn your mind from my affairs. All the caravans of the land and the ships of the sea have arrived, but I have not seen any letter or commission for me. Even more so: in the letters received from you by our friend So-and-so—may God keep him—no mention is made of me.

Now, my lord, you know well that it is a gift of God to be favored with affection and to be close to the hearts of friends, as it is said [Genesis 39: 3–4]: “The Lord caused all that Joseph did to prosper in his hands; so Joseph found favor in his master’s sight.” If this heavenly favor is withheld from a man, he is forgotten by his friends, and consideration for him becomes slender. When things come to this, a believing man should not make accusations of being neglected and slighted, but thank God, as we must, for both happiness and distress. In short, God is to be praised for everything. I have made it incumbent upon myself not to trouble you by asking you to write to me or to do any business for me, as I feel that this might be a burden for you. Thus, let us wait patiently for a turn of fortune, when our friends will again be the same as they used to be, if God will.²³

This letter, like most of the Geniza letters, is written in Arabic language and Hebrew characters. Another letter of renunciation, written in

²⁰ Details in *A Mediterranean Society* (see n. 9) 1: pp. 164–169. The relationship is described there as “Friendship” or “Informal cooperation” in order to differentiate it from the various forms of partnerships and commendas, which were concluded through legal documents issued by a court or a notary.

²¹ *A Mediterranean Society* 1: pp. 347 and 489, nn. 9–13, where further details about the institution of the *rafiq*.

²² University Library Cambridge (England), Taylor-Schechter Collection 13 J 21, f. 5, 11. 15–18, edited by S. D. Goitein in *Harel* (Tel Aviv, 1962), p. 146. This Arabian Jew does not use the term *rafiq*, but writes *kunt mu'akkhī*, “I concluded a brotherhood,” see n. 14, above.

²³ Taylor-Schechter 12.175, ed. S. D. Goitein, *Tarbis* 34 (Jerusalem, 1965): pp. 169–174. Joseph b. Berechiah, Qayrawān, writes to Joseph Ibn 'Awkal in Cairo.

most beautiful Arabic characters, contains far stronger wording. The writer had for some time considered giving up the friendship—similar allegations are made in other letters of renunciation—but the latest misdeeds committed against the writer by the recipient and his son had made the measure full. After all this, one is astonished to read on the reverse side: "Carry this letter to my intimate friend, the friend of my soul." No name is on the address, which was regarded in those days as an indication of greatest intimacy.²⁴

The letters just referred to originated in the eleventh century. A formal contract of friendship between scholars is known to me only from a far later period. It was written in Cairo on January 2, 1564. The two partners conclude the pact for their own lifetime and that of their children and children's children; they will pray in the same synagogue (which means that they will meet at least twice a day all their lives); and, perhaps most important for them, they will lend each other any book they might possess for a duration of twenty days for the purpose of study or copying and will never conceal from each other any book they have.²⁵

Similar contracts from the thirteenth century are referred to in Hebrew literature from Germany²⁶ and Spain.²⁷ Therefore, I assume that we have

²⁴ Taylor-Schechter Arabic Box 41, f. 53. This letter and the one referred to in n. 23 are translated in full in the present writer's *Mediterranean People: Letters and Documents from the Cairo Geniza Translated into English* 2 (in preparation for the press).

²⁵ MS Firkovitch II 236, f. 5, ed. Jacob Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature* (Cincinnati, 1931) 1: pp. 472-474.

²⁶ J. Mann, *loc. cit.*, pp. 453-454, quotes the ethical will of Judah b. Asher b. Yehiel (born and bred in Germany, thirteenth century, emigrated to Spain), who reports that his grandfather was bound to a friend by a covenant which comprised also partnership in the religious merits accruing from a pious life. When, as was the custom, Yehiel's coffin was opened before being lowered into the grave, his friend reminded him to make sure of their common share in Paradise, whereupon a look of joy lit the dead man's face. That will is available in an English translation in Israel Abrahams, *Hebrew Ethical Wills* (Philadelphia, 1926) 2: p. 187.

²⁷ Dr. Meir Benayahu, author of *Azulay* (Jerusalem, 1959, where, 1: pp. 16-17, the later contracts of brotherhood are discussed) drew my attention to a pact of friendship made in Cordova, Spain, in 1317, where Jacob b. Hananel (Sicilli) and Hezekiah undertake to emigrate jointly to the Holy Land. On this pact see Alfred Freimann, "Ascher ben Jechiel," *Jahrbuch der Juedisch-Literarischen Gesellschaft* 12 (Frankfurt, 1918): p. 281 (reprint, p. 45). The text of this highly interesting pact

here a general medieval phenomenon common to the Christian and Muslim worlds. I shall be grateful for relevant non-Jewish references.

I conclude with the strangest item about friendship found thus far in the Geniza, a book of divination, written in the unmistakable hand of a prominent lawyer and court clerk who was active between 1066 and 1108. He claims possession of secret methods for guiding those seeking his advice and not being in need of horoscopes and astrological computations. Here are answers to three queries about friendship found in different parts of the booklet.

1. You have asked me which of the two of you loves his friend, *ṣāḥib*, more. I see that you love him more. May the Creator make the two of you love each other permanently and may not let anyone take pleasure in your failure.

2. Know that love is from God and he has granted you the love of your friend. Everything comes from God. Therefore praise and thank him that he has made you beloved by him and by everyone.

3. You have asked me which of the two of you loves his friend more. I see that the love of the two of you is even. May the Creator make your love permanent and not separate you in eternity.²⁸

The reader may have wondered where homosexuality comes into all this. No doubt it must be taken into consideration. The Arabs were studious disciples of the Greeks and Persians in this matter and perhaps did not need teachers. This brand of friendship, too, had its formal aspects. A poet would mention the male object of his love by name in his poems.²⁹ A powerful ruler would have a favorite whose specific role was known to everyone. The Bible puts the death penalty on any form of homosexuality. But it was only natural that the environment was not

is now easily accessible in B. Dinur, *Israel in the Diaspora* 2, bk. I (Tel-Aviv, 1965): pp. 532-533.

²⁸ Taylor-Schechter Arabic Box 44, f. 54. A small booklet in the hand of Hillel b. Eli, about whom *A Mediterranean Society* (1971) 2: p. 231, and *passim*. The passages translated are found on fol. 3a, no. 4; fol. 5a, no. 5; fol. 8a, no. 5.

²⁹ An outstanding example: Ibn Sahl al-Isrā'īlī al-Andalusī of Sevilla, a convert to Islam and famous poet, whose *dīwān*, or collection of poems, has often been printed. He mentions his young friend Mūsā (Moses) again and again in his poems, using the whole gamut of the Koranic stories about the Biblical Moses in order to illustrate the vicissitudes of his love. See *Dīwān Ibn Sahl al-Andalusī*, ed. Ihsān 'Abbās (Beirut, 1967), introduction, pp. 46-47.

without influence on the Jews of the medieval Near East, as again is proved by the Geniza.

As far as literary sources are concerned, the subject was treated extensively by J. Schirman, "The Ephebe in Medieval Hebrew Poetry," *Sefarad* 15 (1955): pp. 55-68. Schirman quotes Jewish authors of the Karaite persuasion, writing in the ninth and tenth centuries, who deplore the pernicious influence of the Muslim higher classes, indulging in this vice, on their Jewish neighbors. He also points out that the admiration of the beautiful male youth, so common a topic in Hebrew poetry in Islamic countries during the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries, disappears entirely in the Spanish, Provençal, and Italian Hebrew poetry, written in a Christian environment in the subsequent period.³⁰

The Cairo Geniza has preserved a detailed statute regulating the pilgrimage to the holy shrine of Dammūh, southwest of Cairo.³¹ Among a great many other prohibitions the statute forbids that young men or a mature man with a boy should separate from the crowd, least they should get a bad reputation and become suspect; of what, is obvious.³² Even more outspoken is a letter written on the occasion of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in September, 1052. Pilgrims from Tiberias, Palestine, and Tyre, Lebanon, had assembled for the service on the fast of the Day of Atonement, the highest Jewish holiday, when a man from Tiberias

openly made overtures to one from Tyre. The amorous scene led to a fist-flight between the two groups of pilgrims and the police had to be called in. The rather childish writer goes on to describe the subsequent pilgrimage and concludes: "Never did we have more beautiful holidays."³³

The two cases reported indicate that homosexuality was not entirely absent from Jewish Near Eastern society during the High Middle Ages, but was regarded as a despicable vice rather than a deadly crime. In view of the enormous amount of private and public correspondence and of legal material preserved in the Geniza the rarity of the references to this evil proves that it did not form the object of great social concern, while formal friendship, as we have seen, did.

In conclusion, I wish to venture a generalization. While in the Christian West the adoration of female perfection led to the cult of Mary, the mother of the Saviour, in the Muslim East "the contemplation of the unbearded"³⁴ and the attachment to the master were sublimated into self-effacement in the image of God. The "I-Thou" relationship of the official religions was replaced by the ecstasy of identification, of loving God as being one's own self:

Oh ye who are seeking God, seeking God,

Why do ye seek what ye have not lost?

There is no need for seeking. Ye are He ye are He.
Nothing exists besides ye. But where are ye?
Where are ye?"³⁵

³⁰ Schirman's findings were questioned by N. Allony, "The Zevi (-Nasib) in the Hebrew Poetry of Spain," *Sefarad* 23 (1963): pp. 311-321. Allony points out that the passages discussed were either purely literary exercises, or referred to God, or were meant to be taken humorously or cynically (whatever that may mean). While it might be conceded that some of Schirman's interpretations are open to comment, the main result of his study can hardly be questioned.

³¹ About this "Synagogue of Moses" on the site of ancient Memphis see Norman Golb, "The Topography of the Jews of Medieval Egypt," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 24 (1965): pp. 255-259.

³² Taylor-Schechter 20.117 verso, edited by S. Assaf, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History* (Jerusalem, 1946), pp. 160-162.

³³ Taylor-Schechter 8 J 22, f. 25, partly edited in J. Braslawsky, *Studies in our Country* (Tel-Aviv, 1954), pp. 120-121, who was, however, unable to read the relevant passage. See *A Mediterranean Society* 2: pp. 168 and 555, n. 54.

³⁴ This Arabic phrase (*an-naẓar ila 'l-murd*) is the technical term for the inducement of mystical rapture by friendship with a beautiful youth. The majority of the Sufi masters strongly disapproved of this dangerous avenue to religious ecstasy, e.g., al-Qushayrī, *loc. cit.* (see n. 15, above).

³⁵ Verses by Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, ed. R. A. Nicholson, *Selected Poems from the Divānī Shamsī Tabrīz* (Cambridge, 1898): p. 251.



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WOMEN AND THE ADVENT OF ISLAM

LEILA AHMED

Probably 'Aisha rather than Khadija should be counted the first woman of Islam. Khadija, the wealthy widow who employed Moḥamad to oversee her caravan (trading between Mecca and Syria) and proposed to and married him when she was forty and he twenty-five, was already in her fifties when Moḥamad received his first revelation and began to preach Islam. 'Aisha, on the other hand, was born to Muslim parents and betrothed to Moḥamad when she was a child and he in his fifties and already launched on his prophetic career. Khadija rightly occupies a place of first importance in the story of Islam itself because of her importance to Moḥamad's life: it was her wealth that freed him from the need to earn a living and enabled him to lead the life of contemplation that was the prelude to his prophethood; and her support and confidence were crucial in his venturing to preach Islam.

To place Khadija at the beginning of the story of women in Islam—where she is regularly placed—is, however, misleading. She was after all for most of her life a Jahilia (pre-Islamic) woman, shaped by Jahilia ways, and her life and outlook exemplified Jahilia—not Islamic—attitudes and

Wherever possible I have used editions that give an English translation as well as the Arabic text.

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practices: her economic independence, her initiating of her own marriage, and not even needing, apparently, a male guardian to act as intermediary (as was to be required by Islam), her marriage to a man many years younger than herself, and her remaining with him in a monogamous marriage (Moḥamad had no other wife till after her death), all must reflect Jahilia, not Islamic, practice. Conspicuously, too, such features are distinctly not typical either of Moḥamad's marriages after he became the established prophet and leader of Islam, nor of Muslim men's since. It is 'Aisha, surely—betrothed to the prophet when she was six, married at about ten, and, soon after, when the Koranic verses on veiling and seclusion were revealed, to become along with her co-wives the first Arab woman to observe the new Islamic customs of veiling and seclusion—it is she who, properly, should hold the place of first woman of Islam. Destined to become an authority whose pronouncements remain valid to this day on the proper conduct of Muslims, consulted even in matters of Muslim law, it is her life and not Khadija's which in outline at least bears the unmistakable imprint of the new Islamic outlook. The difference between their lives and, in particular, the differences in the degree of control and autonomy they exercised with respect to marriage encapsulate and foreshadow the changes that Islam would effect for women in Arabia.

It is axiomatic that the establishment of Islam was momentous in its consequences for women, and yet though the general subject of women in Islam has generated a vast literature, it is still exceedingly difficult to discover what in fact Islam's impact was for women, despite the fact that the issue is ideologically central to any discussion of the subject of women in Islam, contemporary as well as historical. Partly, the subject being so ideologically charged, it has tended to generate a literature of assertion rather than evidence. Muslim apologists and New Muslim circles declare that Islam accords women a status unsurpassed in other cultures and religions, and that unquestionably in its own day it improved the condition of women. They declare that it banned the Jahilia practice of female infanticide, gave women the unprecedented right to inherit property, and, in permitting men up to four wives, curbed a previously rampant polygamy. Such claims are often reiterated in well-meaning Western works on women in Islam, a recent one, for instance, declaring that "in the pre-Islamic era there was no question of a woman being an heir"—self-evidently a claim meriting fuller investigation in light of Khadija's financial independance.¹ Women's inheritance, indeed, may have been a custom in Mecca, and there are other instances of Meccan women trading, like Khadija, in their own right.²

¹ Wiebke Walther, *Woman in Islam* (London: George Prior, 1981), 33.

² Asma' bint Mukharibah, for instance, Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat*, ed. E. Sachau, in *Biographien*, 9 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1904), 8:220. See also W. Montgomery Watt, *Mohamad at Medina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 290.

The genuine difficulty of construing, at this distance, what exactly occurred in that society, particularly given the perplexing and controversial nature of the available evidence, is also perhaps a reason for the subject's neglect despite its obvious importance. On the basis of that evidence, for example (to give some idea of both how complex and how controversial its potential implications), one early scholar concluded that pre-Islamic society had been matriarchal and that Islam therefore had displaced a matriarchy to institute a patriarchal order.³ In more recent times a leading Western Islamicist has put forward a modified version of this theory: gathering together the evidence for the pre-Islamic practice of uxorilocal marriage, and of the practice, in some parts of Arabia, of polyandry, he suggests not that pre-Islamic Arabia was matriarchal but that it was a predominantly matrilineal society, in which paternity was of little or no importance, and that the society was in the process of changing, around the time of Moḥamad's birth (ca. 570. C.E.), from a matrilineal to a patrilineal society—a change that Islam was to consolidate. The change from matrilineal to patrilineal was occurring, it is speculated, because of Mecca's commercial growth over the fifth/sixth centuries and the progressive sedenterization of its previously nomadic dominant tribe, the Quraysh. This led to the breakdown of tribal values and, in particular, of the tribal notion of property as communal, now displaced, as dominant traders accumulated wealth, by the rise of individual property. Men now wished to pass on property to their offspring, which gave new importance to paternity and led eventually to the complete displacement of matrilineal by patrilineal.⁴

Today the evidence cannot be regarded as lending support to the theory of a matrilineal system once having prevailed throughout Arabia. However, the fact that the sexual/marital arrangements of pre-Islamic Arabia were very different from those of Islam cannot be disputed: indeed, it is well known that the area in which Islam introduced the greatest reform was that of marriage and sexual relations, a large proportion—perhaps 80 percent—of Koranic rulings being devoted to regulating marital relations and the conduct of women. That is, the establishment of Islam was marked by the institution of new sociosexual norms to at least the same extent as by the institution of a new religion and polity.

The changes in male/female relations instituted by Islam thus appear to have occurred against a background of an Arabia in which both matrilineal and patrilineal systems, and the diverse sociosexual arrangements they

³ W. Robertson Smith, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1885).

⁴ Watt, 272–73. More recently Chelhod has suggested that the change represented, in part, the spread of the matrilineal practices of a sedentary South Arabia to the nomadic, patrilineal tribes of the north. Joseph Chelhod, "Du nouveau a propos du 'Matriarcat' Arabe," *Arabica* 28, fac. 1 (1981): 76–106.

entailed, were in practice. In the changes it instituted in this area, as indeed in other areas, Islam appears to have consolidated a trend of change already under way in Arabia, particularly in Mecca: a Mecca in which, as a result of its commercial expansion, the entire fabric and institutions of living of the old nomadic order were undergoing change. This in no way preempts, however, Islam's radical innovativeness in its specificity.

External sociocultural influences following from Mecca's new openness, as a result of its expanding trade, to the wider ancient world, as well as the internal pressures of economic and social change would have played a part now in shaping the outcome of this transformative moment. Meccan trade linked Syria and the Byzantine empire to the north with Yemen and Ethiopia to the south. This meant increasing Meccan contact with and exposure to the culturally and materially more advanced, powerful world to the north, growing exposure to its predominating religions, Christianity and Judaism, and to its sociosexual arrangements (as well as with those of Persia): all at this point distinctly patriarchal. Thus, well before Moḥamad began to preach Islam, an Arabian form of monotheism (its practitioners called *ḥanifs*) had appeared. External cultural influences perhaps had a part in the growing shift away from uxorilocal practices such as Moḥamad's own background exemplified: Moḥamad's mother, Amna bint Wahb, having remained with her clan after her marriage to ʿAbdullah, who would visit her there; Moḥamad, whose father ʿAbdullah died before his birth, passed to the care of his paternal kin only after Amna's death, which occurred on her way back from a trip to Medina in the company of a female slave, Umm Ayman, and her six-year-old son.⁵ Moḥamad's own grandfather had been extracted from his mother's clan and appropriated by his father's only with difficulty.⁶

Conceivably in uxorilocal, matrilineal marriages such as those that existed in Arabia at about the time of Moḥamad's birth or a little earlier, women as well as men might have more than one spouse. A woman "marrying" and remaining with her clan might also marry and receive visits from other men (paternity not being important since the children belonged in any case to the maternal kin), just as men might "marry" and visit a number of women.⁷ It is known at any rate that there was no single, fixed institution of marriage at the time of the advent of Islam and that a variety of types of union were practiced by both women and men. Al-Bukhari reported on the authority of ʿAisha that marriage in the Jahilia was of four types, one of these being, according to ʿAisha, "the marriage of people as it is today," while two of the other types she describes were polyandrous.⁸

⁵ Ibn Saʿd, 1, 1, 73.

⁶ Watt, 375.

⁷ Ibid., 275.

⁸ Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meaning of Saḥiḥ*, Arabic and English, trans. Muhammad M. Khan, 9 vols. (Medina: Dar al Fikr, 1981), 7:44. Here and below I have translated the Arabic rather than followed the precise wording of Khan's rendering.

Evidence for Medina indicates that many men had two and sometimes three wives and also that as many women had two and sometimes three or even four husbands. While we do not know if the multiple marriages in these cases were consecutive or concurrent, examples of distinctly polyandrous marriages are known for both Mecca and Medina.⁹ Also, although polygyny as well as polyandry was a custom, the type of polygyny endorsed by Islam (wherein a man marries and maintains a number of women in one or more establishments) seems to have been an innovation of Moḥamad's: there is no evidence of its having been a practice in Medina, and if there were instances of it before Moḥamad's initiative, it was clearly not widespread.¹⁰ Divorce and remarriage appear to have been common for both men and women, with women as well as men able to initiate divorce. *Kitab al Aghani* reports: "The women in the Jahilia, or some of them, divorced men, and their [manner of] divorce was that if they lived in a tent they turned it round, so that if the door had faced east it now faced west . . . and when the man saw this he knew that she had divorced him and did not go to her."¹¹ Divorce was not generally followed by the 'idda or "waiting period" for women before remarriage—an observance Islam was to insist on—and although it appears to have been a custom for a woman to go into retirement for a period after her husband's death, it seems to have been laxly observed.¹²

It was against this background of varied marriage customs that the specific lineaments of Islamic marriage were gradually defined. The Koran was revealed piecemeal in the course of Moḥamad's life, and the majority of the laws on marriage and divorce and those directly affecting women's status were revealed after the Muslims had become an established community in Medina with Moḥamad as the acknowledged religious/secular leader. Even at the early stages, however, the institution of a type of marriage insisting on the recognition of paternity as *the* Islamic type of marriage was evidently part of the Islamic message. The pledge of allegiance to Islam, later formalized in the Koran, sura 60:13 (known as the Pledge of the Women: the men's pledge differing only in that it included the duty of defense) seems from its earliest stages to have included a pledge to refrain from *zina*, a term usually rendered as "adultery." What *zina* meant before Islam—in a society in which a number of different types of union were legitimate—is not clear. The men of Taif, for example, complained when conquered by Moḥamad and taking the oath to Islam, that *zina* was necessary to them since they were merchants (for them, in other words, it was a practice to which no stigma was attached), and one woman's

⁹ Ibn Sa'd, vol. 8: "Hind," 231; and "Buraida" 251. See also Watt, 277–79, 376–77; Gertrude Stern, *Marriage in Early Islam* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1939), 61–62, 172–73.

¹⁰ Watt, 277–79; Stern, 62.

¹¹ Abu'l Faraj al-Isfahani, *Kitab al Aghani*, 20 vols. (Bulak, 1285 A.H./1868), 16:106.

¹² Stern, 139–43.

indignant response when taking the oath, "Does a free woman commit *zina*?" has been understood to mean that she felt that any union a free woman entered into could not be termed *zina*.¹³ At the time of its first use in Islam, then, the term may have referred to other types of marriage, including the polyandrous, and to forms of "temporary" marriage also practiced in the Jahilia and which Islam would outlaw. 'Aisha, in her remarks about the different types of Jahilia marriages, concludes: "When Mohamad (God bless and preserve him) was sent with the Truth, he abolished all the types of marriage [*nikah*] of the pre-Islamic period . . . except the type of marriage [*nikah*] which people recognize today."¹⁴ The fact that in prohibiting adultery and sexual misconduct generally Islam was outlawing previously accepted practices is presumably among the reasons for the otherwise surely extraordinary Koranic ruling (4:16) that four witnesses should be produced to convict anyone of these crimes. The ruling suggests both that those engaging in practices being designated by Islam as sexual misconduct were engaging in them with some openness (the openness appropriate to relatively accepted rather than "immoral" or prohibited practices) and that Moḥamad realized that such practices could not be instantly eradicated.

Islam's institution of one form of marriage as the sole legitimate form and its outlawing of all others would precipitate, the material surveyed in the following pages suggests, dramatic social change. The particular type and specific lineaments of the form of marriage it rendered the exclusively normative form was of decisive importance: a type of marriage based unambiguously and categorically on the privileging of male right, father right, and the abolition not only of customs clearly incompatible with this, such as polyandry, but also of customs—such as women's right to initiate divorce—which in any way encroached on the unqualified endorsement of male precedence with respect comprehensively to all matters of divorce, plurality of wives, and right to offspring. That this became the normative form of Islamic marriage would be crucial, would be *the* pivotal point precipitating transformation in the relations between the sexes. It would also lead to the foreclosing of freedoms, activities, and roles that had been open to Jahilia women.

In tracing out the impact of Islam on women, I have tried to include material that might convey a sense of women's lives at the time, tangibly and practically—what tasks they performed and how they participated in the community's life: facts ultimately also relevant to the larger investigation. The source material—accounts of the Prophet's life, of early Muslims, and the Ḥadith (Traditions), for example—is replete with such information: early Muslim historians, eager to record all they could about the Prophet

¹³ Watt, 384; Ibn Saʿd, 8:4.

¹⁴ Al-Bukhari, 7:45–46.

inevitably also recorded material involving women. Even texts incorporating commentary on Koranic verses include such material, in that they give accounts of situations that "occasioned" the revelation of particular verses, situations, such as those bearing on the verses on veiling and seclusion, often involving women and in particular Moḥamad's wives.

It is noteworthy that in its account of pre-Islamic customs, this early material is material that has already been ideologically edited from an Islamic standpoint. All the material we have on the Jahilia dates from at least a century after Moḥamad's death and thus was written down by Muslims (the term "Jahilia," usually translated as the "Age of Ignorance," was the name Muslims gave to that period). For example, when Ibn Sa'd asserts that none of Moḥamad's foremothers through five hundred generations, was a "fornicator" in the manner "of the Jahilia," he refers presumably to forms of union, including polyandry, that were accepted practice and not "fornication" in the Jahilia but that were outlawed by Islam.¹⁵ Conversely, practices endorsed by Islam—for example, polygyny—are mentioned without parallel censor. The texts, that is, themselves discreetly and continuously reaffirmed the new Islamic practices and branded the old "immoral."

Further, although these early records were written down by men, a significant portion of the accounts of the Prophet and his times (a literature forming the core of the Islamic corpus revered as the authentic annals of early Islam and looked to as a model for Muslim conduct and a source for Muslim law) was recounted on the authority of women, that is, traced itself back to a woman of the Prophet's generation as the first teller, and usually to a woman who was a Companion of the Prophet, generally a wife or daughter. Women therefore (and 'Aisha most particularly) have had an important part in the authoring of the official history of Islam, and in creating that literature that established the normative practices of Islamic society. This in itself is an indication that the first generation of Muslims (the generation that stood closest to the Jahilia days and Jahilia attitudes toward women), and their immediate heirs, had no difficulty in accepting women as authorities. It also means that the early literature incorporates material that fairly directly expressed the views of women; 'Aisha's indignant response, for instance, to the notion that women might be religiously "unclean" like dogs or donkeys. "You equate us [women] with dogs and donkeys!" she exclaims in one *ḥadith*, "The Prophet would pray while I lay before him on the bed [between him and the qibla]."¹⁶ There is also, though, evidence strongly suggesting, as will be seen below, some perhaps rather critical censorship.

* * *

¹⁵ Ibn Sa'd 1,1:32.

¹⁶ Al-Bukhari, 1:289; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 6 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktab al Islami lil Tiba' wa'l nashr, 1969), 6:42.

In a cave in Hira, a hill near Mecca, to which he had taken to retiring for solitary contemplation, Moḥamad, now forty years old, received his first revelation: a vision of the angel Gabriel, commanding him to read. Shivering from the experience, he hurried to Khadija, who comforted him physically and mentally, wrapping him in a blanket and assuring him that he was indeed sane. Later she took Moḥamad to her cousin Waraka who was Christian, and versed in the Hebrew scriptures, and he confirmed what had evidently occurred to her, saying that the angel Gabriel had indeed also been sent by Allah to Moses. Thereafter, the Judeo-Christian framework was to be the framework within which Moḥamad would present his prophethood.¹⁷

Khadija, who hired Moḥamad to trade on her behalf reportedly because of his reputation for honesty and who proposed to and married him when he was in her employ now became his first convert. Her faith now—the faith of a mature, wealthy woman of standing in the community—must have been of some weight in influencing others, particularly members of her own important clan, the Quraysh, to accept Islam.¹⁸ From the earliest years women were among the converts, including women whose clans were fiercely opposed to Moḥamad, such as Umm Habiba, daughter of Abu Safyan, Moḥamad's formidable enemy. They were also among the Muslims who, under the pressure of a growing Meccan opposition and persecution of Moḥamad and his followers, emigrated (ca. 615 C.E.) to Abyssinia.¹⁹

It was during the period of persecution in Mecca (to lead eventually to the Muslims' and Moḥamad's migration to Medina) that Moḥamad spoke verses sanctioning the worship, along with Allah, of the three Meccan goddesses, the "daughters of Allah," Allat, Manat, and Al-ʿUzza, a development which briefly appeased the Meccans. The verses however were shortly abrogated, having been "thrown" upon Moḥamad's tongue by Satan at a time when Meccan persecution was growing intense and the Meccans were offering Moḥamad position and wealth if he ceased reviling their goddesses. As they stand in the Koran now, the verses in their amended form (Koran, 53:19–22) point out (as they are traditionally explained) the absurdity of Allah's having daughters while mortals could have (the preferred) sons. As they stand, the verses therefore confirm what the practice of female infanticide anyway indicated, that the existence of goddesses in the late Jahilia period (or their survival into it) did not mean a concomitant valuation of females above or as much as males.²⁰

¹⁷ Al-Bukhari, 1:1–4.

¹⁸ Ibn Saʿd, 8:9. Khadija is described in the same text as a woman "of honor and power and a hirer of men" (8:9).

¹⁹ Gertrude Stern, "The First Women Converts in Early Islam" *Islamic Culture* 13, no. 3 (July 1939), 291–305, 293.

²⁰ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 102–5.

In 619 C.E. Abu Talib, Moḥamad's uncle and protector, and head of their clan, and Khadija, both died, within days of each other. Moḥamad himself "went down into the pit," to place Khadija in her tomb in the Hujun, a hill near Mecca that was the burial place of her people. Neither Moḥamad nor Khadija's daughters appear to have inherited anything from Khadija, and it is possible that she lost her wealth as a result of the Meccan persecution.²¹

Abu Talib had not converted to Islam though he had granted Moḥamad the full protection of a clan member, and thereby made it possible for him to survive the Meccan persecution. His successor as head of the clan was Abu Lahab, another uncle of Moḥamad's, who was married to Umm Jamil, sister of Abu Sufyan, Moḥamad's great enemy. Soon after Abu Talib died, Abu Lahab sided with his wife's clan and refused Moḥamad clan protection. When a Koranic revelation then cursed Abu Lahab and Umm Jamil, the latter, carrying a stone pestle, went searching for Moḥamad and came to where he sat with Abu Bakr, by the Ka'aba. God, however, made Moḥamad invisible to her so that she saw only Abu Bakr. Asking him where Moḥamad was, she said, "I have been told that he is satirising me, and by God, if I had found him I would have smashed his mouth with this stone." She was a poet, she then declared, and recited:

We reject the reprobate.
His Words we repudiate.
His religion we loathe and hate.²²

Bereft of the clan's protection, Moḥamad actively began to seek converts and protectors beyond Mecca. He began a series of negotiations with people from Medina who, while on pilgrimage to Mecca in 620 C.E. had converted to Islam, (the Ka'aba, now the sacred shrine of Islam, was also a holy shrine before Islam). The following year they returned with more converts, and in June of 622 C.E. seventy-five Medinians, including two women whose husbands were also present, came to a secret meeting with Moḥamad at 'Aqaba, where they pledged to protect and obey him: he was to be received in Medina not as reviled leader of a sect seeking protection but as honored prophet and as designated arbiter of the internal tribal dissensions of Medina.²³

Meanwhile, Moḥamad had also set about his own remarriage—to two

²¹ Omar Ridda Kaḥḥalah, *A'lam al-Nisa fi A'lami al-Arab w'al Islam*, 5 vols. in 3 (Damas-cus: Al-Matba'a al-Hashimiyya, 1959), 1:280; Stern, "The First Women Converts . . .," 291.

²² Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sira Al-Nabawiyya*, ed. Mustapha Al-Saqqa, Ibrahim Al-Ibyari, and 'Abdel Hafith Shibli, 2 vols. (Cairo: Mustapha al-Babi wa-Awladuh, 1375H/1955), 1:356. I quote in this instance the translation of Alfred Guillaume, *Sirat Rasul Allah* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 161.

²³ Ibn Hisham, 2:441.

females, Sawda and 'Aisha. The idea for those marriages came, according to Ibn Ḥanbal, from Khawla, an aunt of Moḥamad's (his mother's sister) who was a convert to Islam. After Khadija's death she "served" Moḥamad, presumably seeing to the housework along with his daughters. Moḥamad had in the past interfered on her behalf in her marriage, rebuking her husband for his celibate outlook and his neglect, consequently, of his duties toward his wife; Ibn Ḥanbal further reports of Khawla (who seems thus to have been rather preoccupied with sexual matters) that she asked Moḥamad if, when "a woman sees in her sleep what a man sees," purification was necessary: only, was the reply, as with a man, "if water is emitted."²⁴ When Khawla suggested Moḥamad's remarriage he had responded by asking whom she would suggest: 'Aisha if he wanted a virgin, she said, and Sawda if a nonvirgin. "Go," he is said to have replied, "bespeak them both for me."²⁵ Having two wives concurrently was not in itself a new practice, but the fact that it was distinctly so for Moḥamad has led some scholars to speculate that he may have had a marriage contract with Khadija which specified that during her lifetime she would be his only wife.²⁶

Sawda, a Muslim widow and former emigrant to Abyssinia, described as "no longer young," sent back with Khawla the message "my affair is in your hands," indicating her consent: a point which confirms that, as Khadija's case had suggested, widows in the Jahilia were free to dispose of their persons without consulting guardians.²⁷ Their marriage probably took place shortly after Khadija's death.

'Aisha's case was different. She was the six-year-old daughter of Moḥamad's closest and most important supporter, Abu Bakr. Khawla took the proposal to Umm Ruman, 'Aisha's mother, who deferred the matter to her husband. His response was that, as 'Aisha was already betrothed, he would have first to release her from that betrothal. There is no suggestion that anyone thought the marriage inappropriate because of the discrepancy in age, though 'Aisha's prior betrothal was evidently to a boy near her age, for Abu Bakr went to seek her release from the boy's parents and found the mother in particular, who was not a Muslim, anxious to release her son from that betrothal because she was afraid it might lead to his converting to Islam. 'Aisha later recalled that the realization that she was married came to her when her mother called her in from her games with her friends and told her that she was not to go out but must stay indoors, and so "it fell into my heart," 'Aisha said, "that I was married." She did not, she recalled, ask

²⁴ Ibn Ḥanbal, 6:409.

²⁵ Nabia Abbott, *Aishah, the Beloved of Mohamad* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), 3.

²⁶ Maxime Rodinson, *Mohamad*, trans. Ann Carter (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), 55.

²⁷ Ibn Sa'd (n. 2 above), 8:36; Stern, *Marriage* (n. 9 above), 34.

to whom.²⁸ Moḥamad thereafter continued his regular daily visits to Abu Bakr's house, but the marriage was not consummated until after the Muslims had migrated to Medina.

Once the agreement with the Medinians at 'Aqaba had been concluded, the Muslims began to migrate in small groups over the following three months to Medina. Moḥamad and Abu Bakr, of the men, left last, and secretly, to escape a Meccan plot to murder Moḥamad, as the Meccans now feared that at Medina he would grow too strong for them. The two remained in hiding first in the hills near Mecca, waiting for the search to be given up, 'Asma, 'Aisha's half-sister, taking them provisions at night and helping to load their camels when they were ready to depart. When they were gone and she returned home, a group of hostile Meccans came searching for them and, when she denied knowledge of their whereabouts, slapped her face so hard, she related, that her earring flew off.²⁹

A far different figure from the reviled and persecuted leader of a persecuted sect, Moḥamad arrived in Medina a prophet with a large religious following and a position of some political importance. The year of the migration, or *hegira* (*hidjra*), 622 C.E., is reckoned by Muslims as the first year of the Islamic era, and the migration did indeed inaugurate a new type of community which was in time to live by the new values and the new laws—many of them to be elaborated over the following few years—of Islam.

Work was immediately begun on the building that was to be Moḥamad's dwelling, the courtyard of which was to be both mosque and where he would conduct secular affairs. He meanwhile lodged on the ground floor of the two-room home of the couple whose home was nearest to the construction. Some sense of the material roughness of their lives, and the Prophet's, is suggested by their alarm once when, breaking a jar of water and fearing that it would fall through onto the Prophet, they mopped it up with their garments, having no cloth to mop it up with.³⁰

Moḥamad then had his family, Sawda and his daughters, fetched from Mecca. Sawda's "house" (as it is generally termed) was the first to be built along the eastern wall of the mosque, though "house" is rather a grand name for it: like those later to be built for Moḥamad's other wives, it consisted of one room of some twelve by fourteen feet, with possibly some veranda-like enclosure giving onto the mosque courtyard that had pillars of palm trunks and a roof of palm branches. Moḥamad had no separate room, sharing in turn those of his wives.³¹

²⁸ Ibn Sa'd, 8:40.

²⁹ Ibn Hisham, 1:487. 'Asma's mother, unlike 'Aisha's mother (both wives of Abu Bakr), did not convert to Islam and did not migrate with the Muslims to Medina. Ibn Sa'd, 8:184.

³⁰ Ibn Hisham, 1:498-99.

³¹ W. Muir, *The Life of Moḥamad* (Edinburgh: J. Grant, 1923), 175-76, 201; Abbott, 50, 68, and *passim*.

Abu Bakr also had his family fetched from Mecca, and they joined him in a house in the suburb of Sunḥ. When ʿAisha was no more than nine or ten, Abu Bakr, anxious no doubt to create between himself and Moḥamad the further bond of kinship, asked Moḥamad why he was delaying in consummating the marriage, and when Moḥamad replied that he was as yet unable to provide the marriage portion, Abu Bakr forthwith provided it himself.³² Then, in their house in Sunḥ, the marriage was consummated. ʿAisha recalled the occasion as follows: the Prophet came to their house, and there gathered about him men and women of Medina, “and my mother came to me and I was swinging on a swing”

and she brought me down from the swing, and I had some friends there and she sent them away, and she wiped my face with a little water, and led me till we stopped by the door, and I was breathless [from being on the swing] and we waited till I regained my breath. Then she took me in, and the Prophet was sitting on a bed in our house with men and women of the Ansar [Medinians] and she set me on his lap, and said, “these are your people, God bless you in them and they in you.” And the men and women rose immediately and went out, and the Prophet consummated the marriage in our house.³³

Even to dwell in this much detail on an event that after all was unimportant in the life of a man whose life was packed with momentous events will seem to some Muslims to be in bad taste. But in the nature of our subject it is precisely these privacies and “unimportant” details in the lives of men that nevertheless have traditionally been allowed to entirely govern and circumscribe the lives of women, that inevitably must be at the forefront of our concern, as it must finally be our concern to examine, by, in part, looking into such details, Islam’s potentiality for respecting the personness of women.

The relationship between Moḥamad and ʿAisha—who throughout was to remain Moḥamad’s undisputed favorite, even when he had added beautiful, sought-after women to his harem—bears looking into a little further. Abbott, ʿAisha’s biographer, stresses Moḥamad’s tender care of and patience with her, and his joining in even in her games with her dolls. However, that the attention of a man in his fifties to a girl of nine or ten can be sexual and yet caring is scarcely comprehensible to modern sensibilities, as are other aspects of that relationship: the emotional equality for example and, on his part (as well, of course, as on hers) dependence, that seem to have pertained between them. This is suggested, for instance, in

³² Ibn Saʿd, 8:43.

³³ Ibn Ḥanbal (n. 16 above), 6:211.

his response of sullen, wounded withdrawal following the famous necklace incident when 'Aisha, left behind at the campsite and arriving the following morning escorted by a young man, is suspected by the community, and finally also by Moḥamad, of infidelity. Moḥamad's distress over the matter became so intense that his revelations ceased for the duration of their estrangement, and his first revelation at the end of that period was the verses declaring her innocence.³⁴ Complementarily, 'Aisha must have felt reasonably "equal" and unawed by this prophet of God, for his announcement, for example, that he had received a revelation permitting him to enter into marriages not permitted other men drew from her the retort, "It seems to me your Lord hastens to satisfy your desire!"³⁵

In other words, not merely in one but in most of its aspects that relationship is essentially inaccessible to modern sensibilities, a fact that emphasizes how completely it was defined by its particular social context, not only in the sense of the mores of the society but in the sense too of that society's specific structuring of its individuals. Nevertheless, as the bare form in which it sometimes figures in the Ḥadīth may remind us ("Of the consummation of marriage with a nine year old [female]: the Prophet, the peace and blessings of God be on him, married 'Aisha when she was six and consummated it when she was nine"),³⁶ its essential significance for the Muslim community was and continues to be its function as practical and legal precedent, the specificity of the original context being then completely discounted and, for this purpose, quite irrelevant. Together these facts highlight what is the fundamental question in Islam in that major domain, the treatment of women (as indeed in others) and that is: whether the religion is to be allowed to remain permanently locked into replicating the outer forms of the specific society into which it was revealed, or whether the true pursuit and fulfillment of the Islamic message entails, on the contrary, the gradual abandonment of laws necessary in its first age. Islamic philosophers such as Ibn 'Arabi, and certain strands of Sufi and Qarmati thought, have from earliest times leaned toward the latter view. Islam was above all, it may thus be maintained, a revolution that transformed its society in its every aspect, ethically, religiously, and socially, and that initiated a new society centered on ideas of moral and social responsibility and justice. Therefore, the undertaking of reforms, even of revolution, in the furtherance of those ideals—rather than merely adherence to the letter of the law—would constitute the truer continuation of the process Islam initiated, and would more accurately realize its message.

'Aisha's removal to Moḥamad's dwelling where Sawda already lived and where they would soon be joined by more wives (rooms being added

³⁴ Abbott, 2, 7–8, 31–35.

³⁵ Ibn Sa'd, 8:112.

³⁶ Al-Bukhari (n. 8 above), 7:65.

for them along the mosque's eastern wall) initiated into Islam the type of Islamic polygyny—virilocal polygyny—which, as noted above, some scholars believe was an innovation of Moḥamad's. Whether new or not, it was deeply consonant in its attendant consequences and implications (such as the husband's right and ability practically now to oversee and control a wife's movements and relations) with the type of marriage that Islam was instituting as normative. The insistence on the *'idda* (waiting period) and the banning of types of union that made difficult the recognition of paternity reflected, it could be argued, the concern that men should be able to share in and take responsibility for their children. The granting to males, further, unconditional rights to offspring (as soon as the period in which they may be considered to need female nurturance was over) and the retaining for males only the right enjoyed by Jahilia women and men of divorcing apparently at will, seem distinctly to connote that in addition the absolute privileging of male right, father right, was also one of Moḥamad's distinct objectives. When one adds to these the licensing of polygyny and of unrestricted male sexual access to women (four wives, and as many concubines as a man desires and can afford), it becomes difficult not to conclude that the absolute empowerment of men in relation to women in all matters relating to sexuality and offspring and the disempowerment of women (and thus the complete transformation of his society's mores in the area of the relation between the sexes) was also itself one of Moḥamad's prime objectives. In import, and indeed explicitly, Koranic verses do recognize women's rights to equality in marriage (for example, "they [wives] have rights corresponding to those which husbands have, in equitable reciprocity" [2:229]), and the Koran's directive to this effect is sufficiently distinct for most schools of Islamic law to grant women the right to be empowered, by marriage contract, to initiate divorce or stipulate their marriage conditions, including monogamy. Nevertheless, the type of marriage Islam was setting up as the norm for that early society evidently was one in which women were disempowered. Fatima Mernissi has implied in her discussion of the subject that the rulings giving the right to divorce exclusively to men, like all Islamic rulings on women, stemmed from and reflected, not some larger concern, but only Moḥamad's purely subjective response to his personal experiences, in this case his being irked because a number of women, daughters of tribal leaders, divorced him (before their marriages' consummation).³⁷ It is indeed difficult to reconcile the Koran's pronouncements on male/female relations with its otherwise consistent emphasis on the centrality of justice and the equal worth of all human beings. It is only in the matter of the rights and responsibilities of males and females that the notion of equal human worth, otherwise so intrinsic to the Koran, seems momentarily suspended: when it declares men to be "guard-

³⁷ Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975), 31–41.

ians over" women and "a degree above" them in the context, in the first case, of economic/inheritance rights, and in the second, that of divorce rights (4:35, 2:229).³⁸ However, to come to these conclusions is apparently also to agree with Islamic clerics and ideologues that the subjection of women is intrinsically and inseparably part of Islam, which would then also be to concede that believing Muslim women must renounce religious belief or accept their subjection as divinely ordained—a view that is most gratifying to the clerics. Clerical Islam, however, the historically dominant form of Islam, though formidably successful in the process of consolidating its dominance in eradicating or suppressing rival interpretations of Islam, has nevertheless never been the only possible reading of Islam. Among the interpretations it has been particularly and implacably hostile to, have been those tendencies within early Sufi and Qarmati thought which inclined toward regarding the Koran's spiritual message and its passion for justice as the kernel of Islam and its laws as the husk to be discarded in the fulfillment of Islam's own vision of the ideal society—namely, a society based on equity and justice for all members without distinction. Significantly, it is within just such readings that, potentially at least, the yoking of religious beliefs with the subjection of women would not be (as it is in clerical Islam) an inevitable and indissoluble yoking, and potentially, within those readings, Muslim women would not be compelled to make the intolerable choice between religious belief and their own autonomy and self-affirmation.

Not any one but rather the sum of all its features makes up the distinctive lineaments of Islamic marriage: its institution, which obviously placed the relations between the sexes on dramatically new footing, was to lead logically, predictably, to the emergence of customs such as veiling and seclusion (or some device by which a man could insure that "his" women were exclusively his and thus his offspring indeed his own) to the circumscribing of women's lives and to great changes in their roles in society.

Soon after Moḥamad's marriage to 'Aisha, and his marriage three months later to Hafsa, daughter of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (who was, along with Abu Bakr, Moḥamad's most powerful supporter), the verses encouraging polygyny—"marry such of the women as seem good to you, two or three or four" (4:4)—were revealed. Islamic apologists, responding to Western criticism, once argued that the verses instituted a curb on a previously rampant polygyny; traditional Islam and modern scholarship, however, agree that, on the contrary, they were intended to encourage it. The verses were revealed after the battle of Uḥud (625 C.E.), in which large numbers of the Muslim men were killed and many women therefore widowed. Islam's disruption of the clan system (many of the widows would

³⁸ The Koranic citations and references are to *The Quran*, Arabic text with a new translation by Muhammad Z. Khan, 3d rev. ed. (London: Curzon Press, 1981).

have been Meccan immigrants and so could not return to the support of their clan) meant that the Muslim community found itself with the responsibility of providing for them. Encouraging men to marry more than one woman both settled the matter of the widows' support and confirmed the young society in its new direction by absorbing the women into the new type of family life and so forestalling their reverting to Jahilia types of unions.

Polygyny seems to have been alien to the Medinians in particular. There was little intermarriage in Medina between Medinians and Meccans. Their different attitudes to marriage, and in particular to the Islamic polygyny, may have been a chief reason.³⁹ Medianian women apparently were noticeably more assertive than Meccan women: 'Umar ibn al-Khattab complainingly stated that before coming to Medina "we the people of Quraysh [Mecca] used to have the upper hand over our wives, but when we came among the Ansar [Medinians], we found that their women had the upper hand over their men, so our women also started learning the ways of the Ansari women."⁴⁰ One Medianian woman is said to have offered herself in marriage to Moḥamad—who accepted—then to have withdrawn her offer when her family, who disapproved, pointed out that she could never put up with co-wives.⁴¹

However, women's right to inherit property, also decreed by Islam (generally speaking, a woman is entitled to about half a man's share), was also a novel and apparently uncongenial decree to Medinians. Medina's being an agricultural community presumably made the law, involving for them the division of land, more complex in its consequences than for the commercial Meccans whose property was in herds and material goods and where (as earlier indicated) women's inheritance in some cases appears to have been a custom before Islam. Mitigating to some extent the stark male control decreed in the marital situation, the law decreeing women's right to inherit—and thus by implication retain control in important ways over their lives—appears surprising and even in conflict with the laws dictating marital relations. For, to rule guaranteeing women's right to own and independently manage property is tacitly to recognize and indeed promote women's right to economic autonomy, and consequently to autonomy in all those domains of life that economic autonomy commands. In consonance with that tacit recognition are those elements in the Koran (already noted) that appear to recognize women's right to equality in marriage and that also run distinctly, even startlingly, counter to its general, insistent thrust toward the privileging of male right, and of the male's absolute and unequal authority. It would be possible to regard both these as fortuitous survivals merely—aspects or features of the old order anomalously retained in the

³⁹ Watt, *Medina* (n. 2 above), 381.

⁴⁰ Al-Bukhari, 7:88.

⁴¹ Ibn Sa'd (n. 2 above), 8:107–8.

new: but in that they are *consonant* anomalies that together recognize and imply women's right to economic autonomy and to equality in marriage—the two domains that between them define and circumscribe an individual's life—it would also be possible to understand their incorporation into the Koran as having profoundly radical implications. For in incorporating these two “anomalous” rulings into a system otherwise giving males exclusive control and economic responsibility, the Koran in effect incorporates into the system it was then initiating the seeds of that system's own future potential destruction.⁴²

From about the time of the battle of Uḥud, as women's freedoms to form and dissolve unions were all but abolished, and as men were given authority over them, so their freedom to participate in the activities of their society began to be circumscribed. Their roles on the battlefield of Uḥud itself give one a glimpse of the tradition of active female participation in Jahilia society, even in so apparently specifically male a domain as warfare. One man for instance reported seeing 'Aisha and another wife of Moḥamad's, their garments tucked up, and their anklets showing, carrying water to those on the battlefield; and other women on the Muslim side are mentioned as tending to the wounded and removing dead and wounded from the field.⁴³ On the opposing, Meccan side Hind bint 'Utbah, wife of the Meccan leader Abu Sufyan, led some fourteen or fifteen women of the Meccan aristocracy onto the battlefield, playing out women's traditional Jahilia role in war of singing war songs and playing on their tambourines.⁴⁴ The Meccans won, and Hind, who had lost father and brothers to the Muslims in previous wars, cut out the liver of the man who had killed her father and cut off his nose and ears and those of other dead on the field.⁴⁵ However, this extreme ferociousness attributed to her, reported in works compiled in the 'Abbasid age, probably owes much of its bloodiness to 'Abbasid hatred of the Umayyad dynasty, founded by Hind's son.

Such free participation in the community's life would soon begin to be drastically diminished, not because directly banned but as a result of the process of change Islam had set under way and as the implications of its new basis for male/female relations worked themselves out. Moḥamad's wives were the first whose lives would begin to be circumscribed. Early texts record the “occasions” of the revelation of the verses instituting veiling and seclusion for Moḥamad's wives, and these in fact offer vignettes of women's

⁴² For further analyses of the possibilities of developing interpretations on this issue, see Fazlur Rahman, “Islamic Modernism: Its Scope, Methods and Alternatives,” and “A Survey of Modernisation of Muslim Family Law,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 1, no. 4 (1970): 317–33; 11, no. 4 (1980): 451–65.

⁴³ Al-Bukhari, 4:85–86.

⁴⁴ Nabia Abbott, “Women and the State on the Eve of Islam,” *American Journal of Semitic Languages* 58 (1941): 259–84, 273. See also Ilse Lichtenstadter, *Women in Aiyam al-Arab* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1935).

⁴⁵ Ibn Sa'd, 3:1, 5–6.

life-styles in the society Islam was displacing, as well as record the steps by which it was to foreclose women's spheres of action. These texts, as will be apparent in the following passages, do not distinguish in their language between veiling and seclusion but use the term "*hidjab*" interchangeably to mean "veil," as in *darabat al hidjab*, meaning "she took the veil" (which in turn meant "she became a wife of Moḥamad's—Moḥamad's wives but not his concubines donning the veil); and to mean "curtain" (its literal meaning) in the sense (of separation/partition) in which it is used in the Koranic verse quoted below; and they also used it to refer generally to the practice of the seclusion or separation and the decrees of veiling/covering for Moḥamad's wives/women, instituted by this and other verses also quoted below.⁴⁶

The wedding feast at Moḥamad's marriage to Zeinab bint Djaḥsh, according to one account, was the occasion for the revelation of a number of these verses. Some of the wedding guests stayed a long while in Zeinab's room chatting, which annoyed Moḥamad. It was in this context that the verses instituting seclusion for Moḥamad's wives were revealed. At this or some other meal, according to another account, the hands of some of the men guests touched the hands of Moḥamad's wives, and in particular 'Aisha's hand touched 'Umar's.⁴⁷ The Koranic verses instituting seclusion do indeed read as if they might have followed from such a situation: "O ye who believe," they read, "enter not the house of the Prophet unless you are invited to a meal, and then not in anticipation of its getting ready. But enter when you are called, and when you have eaten, disperse; linger not in eagerness for talk. This was a cause of embarrassment for the Prophet. . . . When you ask any of the wives of the Prophet for something, ask from behind a curtain. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts" (33:54).

An account going back to 'Aisha connects these and the further verses enjoining Moḥamad's wives and the believing women to draw their cloaks around them so that they may be recognized for who they were and thus not molested (33:60) with another occasion. 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, according to 'Aisha, had been urging Moḥamad to seclude his wives; Moḥamad did not, and one night 'Aisha and Sawda went out (there was no indoor sanitation and the women went out at night) and Sawda being a tall woman, she was recognized by 'Umar from a distance, and he called out to her saying so. Again he urged Moḥamad to seclude his wives. 'Umar's concern that Moḥamad should seclude his wives was in order to guard, according to one account, against the insults of the "hypocrites" (a group of Medinians whose faith was lukewarm) who would abuse Moḥamad's wives and then claim that they had taken them for slaves.⁴⁸ In another account (that several

⁴⁶ Stern, *Marriage* (n. 9 above), 111 ff.

⁴⁷ Ibn Sa'd, 8:126; see also Abbott, *Aishah* (n. 25 above), 20–24.

⁴⁸ Ibn Sa'd, 8:125–27; Ibn Ḥanbal (n. 16 above), 6:271.

different occasions and reasons are given for those verses does not mean that they are all untrue but, rather, that these were all part of the background to the new edicts and represent the kinds of situations that were coming to seem, to new Muslim eyes, unacceptable) 'Umar urged Moḥamad to seclude his wives because Moḥamad's success was now bringing all kinds of visitors to the mosque.⁴⁹ The mosque, serving also as the place where Moḥamad conducted secular affairs, was indeed a place of lively activity. Moḥamad once received there, for instance, the leaders of a tribe not yet converted to Islam. He put up three tents for them in the courtyard while they stayed to conduct negotiations. Envoys from other tribes wanting to deal with Moḥamad would come there looking for him; and Medianian chiefs spent the night there after a battle. One time a warrior brought the head of an enemy to the mosque. People without means slept in the arbor of the north wall.⁵⁰ People also simply sat about or lay there and put up tents. A black woman, an emancipated slave, according to 'Aisha, at one time "put up a tent or hut in the mosque" and would visit and talk with Moḥamad's wives.⁵¹ Many who came hoping for some favor from the Prophet would approach first one or another of his wives to enlist her assistance.⁵²

By instituting seclusion, Moḥamad created a distance between his wives and this thronging community on their doorstep—the distance appropriate to the wives of a now powerful and successful patriarchal leader in a newly unambiguously patriarchal society. In introducing seclusion Moḥamad was in effect summarily creating in nonarchitectural terms the forms (the gynaeceum, the harem quarters) already firmly established in the more anciently patriarchal cultures of Byzantium and Persia—and perhaps indeed he was borrowing from those architectural/social practices of which no doubt he was to some degree aware. As a successful leader he presumably had the wealth now to give his wives the servants necessary if they were to observe seclusion, releasing them from those tasks that women of Moḥamad's family and kin are described as having engaged in: Asma, for instance, Abu Bakr's daughter, fetched water, carried garden produce, ground corn, and kneaded bread, and Fatima, Moḥamad's daughter, also ground corn and fetched water.⁵³

The practice of veiling, unlike seclusion, was not apparently introduced into Arabia by Moḥamad but was to be found there among some classes, particularly in the towns, though it was probably more prevalent in the countries that the Arabs had contact with, such as Syria and Palestine. In

⁴⁹ Abbott, *Aishah*, 25.

⁵⁰ "Masjid," *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1913-).

⁵¹ Al-Bukhari (n. 8 above), 1:257.

⁵² Watt, *Medina* (n. 2 above), 285.

⁵³ Ibn Sa'd (n. 2 above), 8:182-83; Henri Lammens, *Fatima et les filles de Mahomet* (Rome: Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1912), 53-54.

those areas, as in Arabia, it was connected with social status, as was its use among Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Assyrians, all of whom to some degree practiced or had practiced it.⁵⁴ It is nowhere explicitly prescribed in the Koran; the only verses bearing on the matter of women's clothing, aside from those already quoted, instruct women to guard their private parts and throw a scarf over their bosoms (24:32). Throughout Moḥamad's life both veiling and seclusion were observed only by his wives. Moreover, that the formula "[she] took on the veil" is used in the Ḥadith to mean she became a wife of the Prophet suggests that for some time after Moḥamad's death and at the time of the circulation of the material incorporated into the Ḥadith, veiling and seclusion were still thought of as customs peculiar to Moḥamad's wives. It is not known how they spread to the rest of the community. The Muslim conquests, the influx of wealth, the resultant raised status of Arabs, and the Prophet's wives being taken as example probably combined to bring about their general adoption.

There is no record of the reactions of Moḥamad's wives to these institutions, a remarkable silence given their articulateness (particularly 'Aisha's, as the Traditions well attest) on all manner of topics, a silence that draws attention to the fact that those who did the recording had also the power of suppression. One scholar suggested that it was probably the wives' reaction to the imposition of seclusion which precipitated Moḥamad's threat of mass divorce and the tense situation which culminated in the Verse of the Choice.⁵⁵ This is the Koranic verse in which Moḥamad's wives were presented with the choice of divorce or of continuing as wives and accepting the special conduct expected of them as his wives in this life, as well as, eventually, special rewards in heaven.

The threatened divorce was no mere domestic affair. In the month during which Moḥamad withdrew from his wives, the threat of divorce hanging over them, the community at large became gravely concerned over the issue because of its potentially serious consequences since Moḥamad's marriages cemented crucial ties with important members of the Muslim community in Medina and with tribal leaders beyond it. The rumor of a possible divorce reportedly caused greater concern to the community than an anticipated Ghassanid invasion: Abu Bakr and 'Umar, fathers of 'Aisha and Hafsa, (who would become first and second caliph after Moḥamad's death) became deeply perturbed and called on and reprimanded their daughters. Given the seriousness of the situation, the traditional accounts as to the cause of the breach are, as several scholars have noted, astonishingly trivial. Thus the "occasion" for the breach was,

⁵⁴ "Hidjab," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, new ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960-); Stern, *Marriage*, 108-10; E. Abrahams, *Ancient Greek Dress* (Chicago: Argonaut Press, 1964), 34; "Veil," *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1901).

⁵⁵ Stern, *Marriage*, 114-15.

according to one account, that Moḥamad's wives were clamoring for more worldly goods than he had means to provide. Another account blames the bickering that developed between 'Aisha and Zeinab over the equitable distribution between them of shares of a slaughtered animal. Yet another claims that Ḥafsa had caught Moḥamad with Miriam, his Egyptian concubine, in her (Ḥafsa's) apartment, but on 'Aisha's day. After promising Moḥamad that she would not tell 'Aisha, Ḥafsa broke her promise and told her. 'Aisha confronted him, and shortly the entire harem was up in arms over the matter.⁵⁶

Such scenes and troubles, however, are not particularly distinguishable from the lively activities and rivalries that seem to have been part of their ordinary manner of living and therefore do not seem to be grounds for precipitating a serious political crisis. The verses themselves, moreover, which specifically enjoin obedient submissiveness, support the notion of some general protest amongst Moḥamad's wives:

Say O Prophet, to thy wives: if you desire the life of this world and its adornment, come then, I shall make provision for you and send you away in handsome manner. But if you desire Allah and His Messenger and the Home of the Hereafter, then Allah has prepared for those of you who carry out your obligations fully, a great reward. Wives of the Prophet, if any of you act in a manner incompatible with the highest standards of piety, her punishment will be doubled. That is easy for Allah. And whoever of you is completely obedient to Allah and his Messenger, and acts righteously We shall double her reward and We have prepared an honorable provision for her. Wives of the Prophet, if you safeguard your dignity, you are not like any other women. So speak in a simple, straightforward manner lest he whose mind is diseased should form an ill design, and always say the good word. Stay at home and do not show off in the manner of the women of the days of ignorance. [33:29–34]

The choice was put first to 'Aisha, Moḥamad advising her to consult her parents before making a decision. Replying that she had no need to consult her parents ("you know they would never advise me to leave you"), she chose to stay. The other wives followed suit. Verses conferring on Moḥamad's wives (in compensation perhaps) the title of Mothers of the Believers and forbidding them to remarry after his death also probably belong to this period.⁵⁷

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⁵⁶ Ibn Saʿd, 8:131–39. See also Abbott, *Aishah* (n. 25 above), 45, 49–54; Stern, *Marriage* (n. 9 above), 114.

⁵⁷ Abbott, *Aishah*, 56–58.

The trend toward the subjugation of women and the closure of the roles and independence available to them in the old order continued inexorably on its course, leaving an almost smothered trail of defiance, an almost erased memory of the ways of independence.

In 630 C.E. the Muslims took Mecca in an almost bloodless conquest. Abu Sufyan came to the Muslim encampment to make his submission and returned and called on the Meccans to convert to Islam. His wife Hind bint 'Utbah, enraged by his surrender, denounced him publicly, then realizing the cause was lost, she turned on and shattered her gods. Some sources have it that Hind was among the three or four women condemned to death and that she only saved herself by hastily converting to Islam: but this may well be no more than an anti-Ummayyad embellishment of her story.⁵⁸ In any event she spiritedly led the Meccan women as they took the oath of allegiance to Islam. Having received the pledge from the men, Moḥamad turned to receive it from the women. He leads, and Hind responds: "You shall have but one God." / "We grant you that." / "You shall not steal." / "Abu Sufyan is a stingy man, I only stole provisions from him." / "That is not theft. You will not commit adultery." / "Does a free woman commit adultery?" / "You will not kill your children" [a reference to the practice of infanticide]. / "Have you left us any children that you did not kill at the battle of Badr?"⁵⁹

With the Muslim conquest the key of the holy shrine of the Ka'aba was handed over to the Muslims. At the time of the conquest the key was in the hands of Sulafah, a woman. Muslim sources represent her, as they do Ḥubba, another woman known to have held the key at one point, as having been only for safekeeping: Sulafah by her son and Ḥubba by her father, last priest-king of Mecca. However, though indeed no other woman is mentioned as keeper of the key, their minimal role in Islamic records probably reflects Muslim assumptions projected onto the earlier society. In a society and period in which there were *kahinahs* (female soothsayers) and priestesses, Ḥubba at least may well have been in some sense a successor or transmitter of her father's powers.⁶⁰

Two years after the conquest, after a brief illness, Moḥamad died. Lying sick in Maimuna's (one of his wives') room and visited there by his other wives, he began asking where he was due the following day, and the following, trying, they realized, to figure out when he was due at 'Aisha's. Finally he asked to be allowed to retire there and a few days later, on June 11, 632 C.E., he died and was buried in her room: so that 'Aisha's room is now, after the Ka'aba, the most sacred spot in Islam.⁶¹ His death was unexpected and, in the crisis it caused, Abu Bakr settled the question of

⁵⁸ Abbott, "Women . . . on the Eve of Islam" (n. 44 above), 275–76.

⁵⁹ Ibn Sa'd, 8:4. Hind's reply to the phrase about adultery was referred to above.

⁶⁰ Abbott, "Women . . . on the Eve of Islam," 264–66.

⁶¹ Abbott, *Aishah*, 68–69.

where he should be buried by recalling that Moḥamad had said that a prophet should be buried where he expires.⁶² Abu Bakr also, at his request, was buried there, as was 'Umar, who also requested it, although 'Aisha had hoped to keep that last space for herself. Once 'Umar was buried there, she had a partition built between her and the tombs: she had felt at home, she said, sharing her room with her husband and father, but with 'Umar there she felt in the presence of a stranger.⁶³

Following Moḥamad's death there were a series of rebellions in various parts of Arabia, which, by the time of Moḥamad's death, had largely converted to Islam. "False prophets" appeared as leaders of revolt against the Islamic state. At least one armed rebellion was led by a woman, and one of the "false prophets" was a woman. Salma bint Malik was the woman who led the armed rebellion. She had been captured by the Muslims in a battle led by her mother in 628 C.E. and given by Moḥamad to 'Aisha. She served her for a time, and later married a relative of Moḥamad's. At Moḥamad's death she withdrew from the Muslims and returned to her people, who were among those rebelling against Islam. The Muslims had put her mother to death by tying her feet to two beasts which then tore her in two. Salma, determined to avenge her death or die herself, led her men into battle, riding on her mother's camel. She was killed only after "a hundred others" had fallen around her.⁶⁴

The prophetess was Sajah bint 'Aws, of the Tamim, whose mother was of the Banu Taghlib, a largely Christianized tribe. The Tamim were divided about rebelling from Islam: those wanting to reject Islam supporting Sajah. In a civil war her faction lost, and she, with her army, had to leave Tamimi territory. She headed for Yamama, the capital of another "false prophet," Musaylamah, and appears to have made a treaty with him; but nothing is known of her after that. Her teachings have not been preserved: her deity was referred to as Rabb al-Sirab, "The Lord of the Clouds."⁶⁵

Salma and Sajah, though, were apparently a rebel and a prophet who happened to be women. Another rebellion in Ḥadramaut may have been a rebellion of women as women: a rejoicing by them at Moḥamad's death because of the limitations Islam had brought them as women. "When the Prophet of God died," reads a third-century (Islamic) account of this rebellion, "the news of it was carried to Hadramaut":

There were in Ḥadramaut six women of Kindah and Ḥadramaut, who were desirous for the death of the Prophet of God; they therefore (on hearing the news) dyed their hands with henna and

⁶² Ibn Sa'd, 2,2:71.

⁶³ Ibid., 3,1:245, 264.

⁶⁴ Abbott, "Women . . . on the Eve of Islam," 279-80.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 281-84.

played on the tambourine. To them came the harlots of Ḥadramaut and did likewise, so that some twenty-odd women joined the six. . . . [The text then lists the names of some women, including two it describes as grandmothers.] Oh horseman, if thou dost pass by, convey this message from me to Abu Bakr the successor of Aḥmad [Moḥamad]: leave not in peace the harlots, black as chaff, who assert that Moḥamad need not be mourned; satisfy that longing for them to be cut off, which burns in my breast like an unquenchable fire.⁶⁶

Abu Bakr sent al-Muhagir with men and horses against the women, and though the men of Kindah and Ḥadramaut came to the women's defense, al-Muhagir cut off the women's hands. This account is intriguing. Why should the opposition of "harlots" have been threatening enough to Islam to merit a force being sent against them? Moreover, three of the women listed were of the nobility, and four belonged to the royal clan of Kindah. Their status and the support of their men suggest that they were possibly priestesses, not prostitutes, and that in singing and dancing they were attempting to incite their tribesmen to throw off the new religion. They were evidently successful enough in gathering support to constitute a threat worthy of having a force sent against them.⁶⁷

Moreover some women, and not only priestesses, doubtless understood and disliked the new religion's restrictions on women and its curtailment of their independence. Moḥamad's death would have been for them a matter of rejoicing, and the demise of his religion a much desired result. That the religion was understood by some women at the time as being at least rather depressing for women is suggested by a remark of one of Moḥamad's own great-granddaughters, Sukaina, who, asked why she was so merry and her sister, Fatima, always so solemn, replied that it was because she had been named after her pre-Islamic great-grandmother while her sister had been named after her Islamic grandmother.⁶⁸

The Prophet's wives continued to live in their mosque apartments, revered by the community as the Mothers of the Believers. Financially they seemed at first to have depended on private means, on their families, or on incomes they earned through their skills. Sawda, for instance, earned an income from her leather work. They apparently inherited nothing from Moḥamad, Abu Bakr maintaining that Moḥamad had said that such modest property as he had was to go to charity. Later, with the immense revenues from the Arab conquests, 'Umar, as caliph, initiated (in 641 C.E.) state pensions, placed the Mothers of the Believers at the head of the list, and awarded them generous pensions. This confirmed their already prominent

⁶⁶ F. Beeston, "The So-called Harlots of Ḥadramaut," *Oriens* 5 (1952): 16–22, 16.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 16 ff.

⁶⁸ Walther (n. 1 above), 78.

status. 'Aisha, as Moḥamad's favorite wife, received the state's highest pension: acknowledged as having special knowledge of his ways, sayings and character, she was consulted on the Prophet's *sunnah*, or practice, and gave decisions on sacred law or custom.⁶⁹ Other wives also were consulted and authored Traditions, though none were as prominent and prolific as 'Aisha.

'Umar's reign (634–44 C.E.) is regarded as the period in which many of the major institutions of Islam had their origin, for 'Umar was responsible for initiating a series of religious, civil, and penal ordinances, including the punishment of stoning for adultery.⁷⁰ He was harsh toward women in both private and public life: he was ill-tempered with and physically assaulted his wives, and he sought to confine women to their homes and to prevent their continuing to attend mosques.⁷¹ He was unsuccessful in this and instituted segregated prayers instead, appointing a separate imam for each sex. He appointed a male imam for the women, in this also departing from the Prophet's precedent, for it is known that Moḥamad himself appointed a woman, Umm Waraka, to act as imam for her entire household, which included, so far as can be ascertained, men as well as women.⁷² Moreover, after Moḥamad's death 'Aisha and Umm Salama acted as imams for other women.⁷³ 'Umar also prohibited Moḥamad's wives from going on pilgrimage, also a departure from Moḥamad's practice. The prohibition, which was lifted in the last year of 'Umar's reign, must have provoked the discontent of the Mothers of the Believers. "History," however, seemingly has not recorded such discontent, as it has not recorded any opposition on the part of Moḥamad's widows to 'Umar's attempt to prevent women from attending mosques.⁷⁴ These silences, consistently surrounding those kinds of issues, are beginning now to be speaking silences. With the instance of the harsh, swift punishment of the rebellious women of Ḥadramaut before us, we have no ground to imagine that the guardians of Islam would have hesitated, rather they would doubtless have considered it simply their duty to erase rebellion in women from the written page of history as ruthlessly as they eradicated it from the world in which they lived.

'Uthman, the next caliph, continued to allow Moḥamad's wives to go on pilgrimage and revoked 'Umar's arrangement of separate imams. Men and women once again were together in the mosques, the women however, forming a separate group, would now be held back while men left.⁷⁵ However, 'Uthman's restoration of some liberties to women was but the

⁶⁹ Abbott, *Aishah* (n. 25 above), 11, 84, 95–97.

⁷⁰ "Omar ibn al-Khattab," *Encyclopedia of Islam* (1913–).

⁷¹ Abbott, *Aishah*, 88.

⁷² Ibn Sa'd (n. 2 above), 8:335; Stern, "The First Women Converts . . ." (n. 19 above), 299.

⁷³ Ibn Sa'd, 8:355–56, "Rayta," "Na'ila," "Hujaira."

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 8:150; see also Abbott, *Aishah*, 94.

⁷⁵ Ibn Sa'd, 5:17.

brief staying of a tide that was moving inexorably in the contrary direction. 'Aisha was still to take an active and eventually public part in politics, acting out, though, a part that belonged in reality to a dying order. When 'Uthman was murdered, she delivered, veiled, a public address at the mosque in Mecca, proclaiming that his death would be avenged, and thereby gathered around her one of the two factions opposing the succession of Ali. Their opposition was to lead to confrontation at the Battle of the Camel—named after the camel on which 'Aisha sat, in the thick of the battle, inciting and directing her men, as had done her Jahilia forebears. Ali, realizing the importance of her role, had her camel cut down, thus causing her men to fall into disarray and the battle to end. The defeated 'Aisha was magnanimously treated by the victorious Ali. Nevertheless, the important role she played in this battle that has remained controversial in Islamic history (it was the first in which Muslim blood was shed by Muslims) earned her the reproach of many. The charges that the opposition had made from the start, that by going into battle, 'Aisha had violated the seclusion imposed by Moḥamad, who had ordered his wives to stay at home (women's proper place in this new order), seemed the more fully vindicated by her defeat.⁷⁶ 'Aisha then did retire from public life and thus became, as befits the woman who has contributed so richly and importantly to the founding of the Traditions that were to govern Muslim life, the exemplary New Woman.

Women scholars and authorities were still to be met with in the following generation and in the following, though in far fewer number. Gradually it became extremely rare for any of the teachers of Ḥadith to have learned from a woman.⁷⁷ This is the period typically blamed for the restrictions on women's lives that followed from Islam. Nabia Abbott aptly summarizes this view when she states that it was now that women's position in Islam was crystallized "into one of passivity and submissiveness comparable to that already imposed on the women of her Jewish and Christian neighbours" and that by the second and third centuries of Islam, "the seclusion and degradation of women had progressed beyond anything known in the first decades of Islam."⁷⁸ The implication is that the seclusion and degradation of women typical of most of Islamic history is the result not of Islam but of its misinterpretation by later generations. This is also the view of New Muslims: in that first Islamic society, they argue, women participated in the life of the community and performed functions—attended the mosque, led prayers—which they were later to be barred

⁷⁶ Abbott, *Aishah*, 131, 160–69.

⁷⁷ See Ignaz Goldziher, "Women in Hadith Literature," in *Muslim Studies*, ed. S. M. Stern, trans. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern, 2 vols. (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1966–68), 2:366–68; Stern, "The First Women Converts . . .," 22.

⁷⁸ Abbott, "Women and the State in Early Islam," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 1 (April 1942): 106–26, 115, 123.

from, and therefore Islam in reality encouraged women to participate in the community's social and professional life. However, the women and men of that first Islamic society, Moḥamad's contemporaries, were not themselves molded by the ordinances and practices of Islam, though adhering to them consciously no doubt; those that had molded them were the attitudes and practices of the Jahilia society that Islam was transforming, a society in which women had been remarkably active and independent. We have encountered in the preceding pages, even if often fleetingly, Jahilia women in the roles of priestesses, soothsayers, prophetesses, warrior-leaders heading armies, nurses looking after the wounded on the battlefield and venturing into the thick of battle, poets, authors of satirical verse taking for its object formidable male opponents, keepers, in some unclear capacity, of the keys of the holiest shrine of Mecca, encountered them as rebellious women, and as leaders of rebellions that included men, indeed as commanding armies, and, of course, as women initiating and terminating marriages at will, and mingling freely, even the Prophet's wives, until banned by Islam, with the men of their society. It is that heritage, women's roles in the society being superseded and transformed by Islam that, it is here suggested, accounts for those elements of activeness and independence to be found in the women of the first Muslim society. In this reading then, the closure and increasingly more pronounced subjugation that came to women's lives in the next generation were not the result of misinterpretation but represent rather the workings out in history of the implications of the order Islam had introduced (albeit an order intended from the first, as one vein within Islamic thought has always argued, to be itself transitional). That closure therefore bears that relation to its initial, founding institutions and specifically to the lineaments of Islamic marriage, of plant to seed.

*Bunting Institute
Radcliffe College*



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Author(s): Everett K. Rowson

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THE EFFEMINATES OF EARLY MEDINA

EVERETT K. ROWSON

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

There is considerable evidence for the existence of a form of publicly recognized and institutionalized effeminacy or transvestism among males in pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabian society. Unlike other men, these effeminates or *mukhannathūn* were permitted to associate freely with women, on the assumption that they had no sexual interest in them, and often acted as marriage brokers, or, less legitimately, as go-betweens. They also played an important role in the development of Arabic music in Umayyad Mecca and, especially, Medina, where they were numbered among the most celebrated singers and instrumentalists. Although they were subject to periodic persecution by the state, such measures were not based on any conclusions about their own sexual status—they were not assumed to be homosexual, although a few were—but on their activities as musicians and go-betweens, which were seen as corrupting the morals of society and especially of women. A particularly severe repression under the caliph Sulaymān put an end to the *mukhannathūn*'s prominence in music and society, although not to their existence.

IN THE COURSE OF THE FIRST ISLAMIC CENTURY, the holy cities of Mecca and Medina suffered a drastic loss of political power. As the rapidly expanding empire incorporated the populous provinces of Syria and Iraq, the caliphal capital was moved first to Kūfa and then to Damascus, and, after the defeat of the counter-caliph Ibn al-Zubayr in Medina in 73 A.H./A.D. 692, the political significance of the Hijaz was reduced to an occasional futile rebellion. At the same time, the institution of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca from all corners of the empire assured the prosperity of the two cities, and the system of stipends (*dīwān*) instituted by the caliph ʿUmar provided the local aristocracy, among the Quraysh and Anṣār, with a dependable, and bountiful, source of wealth which—more or less intentionally—compensated for their political impotence. The result of this situation was the development of a refined and self-indulgent society, dedicated to luxury and the pursuit of the arts. Traditional Arabic poetry underwent a rapid evolution, producing among other innovations the independent love lyric; and a series of celebrated musicians, closely associated in their endeavors with the love poets, introduced new instruments and new musical styles into the peninsula.

Studies of this first, classical period of Arabic music have often remarked on the fact that the sources regularly identify many male musicians, including some of

the most prominent, as "effeminates," *mukhannathūn*.¹ Observing that our meager sources on pre-Islamic music refer almost exclusively to women, while the most celebrated musicians of the subsequent ʿAbbāsīd period were men, Owen Wright has suggested that these *mukhannathūn* represent "an intermediate, transitional stage in the transfer from a female-dominated to a male-dominated profession";² and he has further speculated that their presumably dubious social status, like that of the slave-girls who, with them, dominated musical circles, contributed to an increasing hostility by the pious to entertainment music, which they associated with wine, sexual license, and the frivolous pursuit

¹ Or *mukhannithūn*. The lexicographers generally consider the forms *mukhannath* and *mukhannith* simple variants, and I shall use the former throughout this article; on attempts to distinguish between the two semantically, see below, p. 675.

² Owen Wright, "Music and Verse," in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, I: Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A. F. L. Beeston et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), 446f. See also H. G. Farmer, *A History of Arabian Music to the XIIIth Century* (London: Luzac, 1929), 44; Shawqī Dayf, *al-Shiʿr wa-l-ghināʾ fī l-Madīna wa-Makka li-ʿaṣr Banī Umayya* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1967), 67.

of pleasure.³ To my knowledge, no further investigation into who and what these *mukhannathūn* were has heretofore been undertaken, despite a relative abundance of sources, particularly anecdotal ones, which tell us a great deal about their identity, behavior, social function, and status, as well as their ultimate fate.

The very existence of a recognized category of persons labelled "effeminate" raises a number of obvious questions. In what way were they effeminate? Was it their mannerisms that were so recognized, their speech, their behavior? Did they wear women's clothes or adopt feminine hairstyles: were they transvestites? To what extent was their effeminacy voluntary, or seen as such? Did they constitute a cohesive social group, a subculture? What social functions, if any, did they perform? Did they represent a kind of *berdache* institution?⁴ What sort of social status did they in fact have? Why, and to what extent, did they come to be associated with music?

Another important question is that of their sexual identity. It is well known to sociologists that the majority of transvestites in our own society are heterosexual in orientation,⁵ and the anthropological literature on institutions classified as *berdache* in various societies reveals considerable diversity in their real or assumed sexual orientation and behavior, including celibacy, heterosexuality, and various forms of bisexuality, as well as homosexuality, although the latter is probably the most common.⁶ An automatic link between the *mukhannathūn* of the Hijaz and homosexuality can therefore by no means be assumed. This question of

sexual identity is all the more significant because of its pertinence to the far larger problem of homosexuality in classical Islamic culture, a subject which has enjoyed remarkably little scholarly attention to date, despite its obvious importance. An inquiry into the role and identity of the early *mukhannathūn* may thus serve in part as a preliminary to future investigation of this larger problem.

The following study will focus on the evidence available on *mukhannathūn* through the first Islamic century. That they had a well-defined role already in pre-Islamic Arabian society is suggested by a number of Prophetic *ḥadīth*, which at least purportedly tell us something about the situation in the Prophet's time. Much richer, however, is the information provided by anecdotal literature, and above all by the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* of Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 356/967), on musical circles in Medina and Mecca several decades later, in the early Umayyad period; these sources offer a relatively full picture of a society in which the *mukhannathūn*, for a period of some two generations, enjoyed a position of exceptional visibility and prestige, and suggest answers to many of the questions posed above. They also describe how this unusual situation came to an abrupt and violent end, under the caliph Sulaymān (reigned 96–99/715–17), although there are wide divergences among the various accounts of this disaster which raise problems of interpretation. We have considerably less information about the *mukhannathūn* in late Umayyad society, and with the coming of the ʿAbbāsids their entire social context seems to have changed radically. Apart from a brief characterization of the nature of this social shift, investigation of the subsequent fortunes of the *mukhannathūn* in the ʿAbbāsīd period must await a future study.

MUKHANNATHŪN IN THE TIME OF THE PROPHET: THE EVIDENCE FROM ḤADĪTH

According to the lexicographers, the verb *khanatha* in the first form means to fold back the mouth of a waterskin for drinking. Derived terms develop the basic idea of bending or folding in the direction of pliability, suppleness, languidness, tenderness, delicacy.⁷ According to Abū ʿUbayd (d. 224/838), the *mukhannathūn* were so called on account of their languidness (*takas-sur*, elsewhere usually paired with *tathannī*, supple-

³ Wright, *ibid.*

⁴ Or *bardache*. This term is applied by anthropologists to a social institution common to many American Indian cultures, in which a male adopts gender attributes (notably, clothing) assigned otherwise to females. See W. Roscoe, "Bibliography of Berdache and Alternative Gender Roles Among North American Indians," *Journal of Homosexuality* 14.3/4 (1987): 81–171; Walter L. Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1986); and, on the term *berdache* (ultimately from Persian *bardaj*, "slave," via Arabic, Italian, and French), Claude Courouve, "The Word 'Bardache,'" *Gay Books Bulletin* 8 (Fall–Winter 1982): 17–19.

⁵ See C. A. Tripp, *The Homosexual Matrix* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), 26.

⁶ David E. Greenburg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), 44; J. M. Carrier, "Homosexual Behavior in Cross-Cultural Perspective," in *Homosexual Behavior: A Modern Reappraisal*, ed. J. Marmor (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 106.

⁷ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, n.d.), 2:1272; al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs* (Kuwayt: Maṭbaʿat Ḥukūmat al-Kuwayt, 1965–76), 5:240ff.

ness), while a languid woman was called *khunuth*.⁸ The *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* attributed to al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad (d. c. 170/786), on the other hand, derives *mukhannath* rather from *khunthā*, hermaphrodite, on the basis of parallel gender ambiguity.⁹ (Despite the plausibility of the latter, it should be noted that there is no term from this root signifying a mannish woman.) Later lexicographers define the *mukhannath* as a man who resembles or imitates a woman in the languidness of his limbs or the softness (*līn*) of his voice.¹⁰ Al-Azharī (d. 370/980) defines the verb *takhannatha* as *faʿala fiʿl al-mukhannath*, “to do the act of a *mukhannath*,” but does not specify what this *fiʿl* is.¹¹ The lexicographers nowhere make mention of dress. From their evidence, then, *mukhannath* has the general meaning “effeminate,” without distinction between involuntary and voluntary behavior, and does not indicate transvestism.

A somewhat different picture of the *mukhannath* emerges, however, if we consider its occurrence in a number of generally accepted Prophetic traditions. These *ḥadīth*, and the literature of comment that developed around them, are of special importance for our subject, because—with the usual caveats about the authenticity of this material—they give us an indication of circumstances and attitudes at the very beginning of Islam, as well as Prophetic pronouncements on the subject which were considered as defining legal and ethical norms. In addition, the commentary literature gives some hints of change over time in societal attitudes.

Although they display the usual profusion of variants, the *ḥadīth* about the *mukhannathūn* which appear in the *Muwattaʿ* of Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/797), the *Musnad* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), and the six canonical collections number essentially seven, which can be summarized as follows:

1. The Prophet cursed those exhibiting cross-gender behavior. In its most common form this *ḥadīth* reads:

⁸ Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, *Gharīb al-ḥadīth* (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-ʿĀmma li-Shuʾn al-Maṭābiʿ al-Amīriyya, 1984), 2:150f. Cf. Ibn Durayd, *Jamharat al-lughā* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm lil-Malāyīn, 1987), 1:418; al-Jawharī, *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, ed. A. ʿA. ʿAṭṭār (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1957), 281.

⁹ Al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, ed. M. al-Makhzūmī and I. al-Samarrāʾī (Baghdad: Dār al-Rashīd, 1980), 4:248. On the question of attribution of this work, see *ET*², s.v. “al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad.”

¹⁰ Al-Zabīdī, *Taj al-ʿarūs* 5:240ff.

¹¹ Al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-lughā*, ed. ʿA. Sarḥān (Cairo: al-Dār al-Miṣriyya lil-Taʾlīf wa-l-Tarjama, 1964–67), 7:335–37.

“The Prophet cursed effeminate men (*al-mukhannathīn min al-rijāl*) and mannish women (*al-mutarajjilāt min al-nisāʾ*).”¹² The principal variant substitutes “men who imitate women” (*al-mutashabbihīn min al-rijāl bil-nisāʾ*) and “women who imitate men.”¹³ The two versions appear side by side in al-Bukhārī’s (d. 256/870) chapter on dress (*libās*); while the *ḥadīth* itself does not specify the kind of cross-gender behavior condemned, the great *muḥaddith*’s apparent assumption that this involved dress, or at least ornament, is supported by other evidence, as will be seen. Some authorities add, to the second version, the further statement that the Prophet commanded, “Cast them out from your houses!” and that he and the caliph ʿUmar each banished one.¹⁴

2. Ibn Māja (d. 273/886) and al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), in the section on false accusation (*qadhf*) of their books on *ḥudūd*, give *ḥadīth* specifying twenty lashes for falsely calling someone a *mukhannath*. In Ibn Māja this is paired with the same penalty for falsely calling someone a *lūṭī* (approximately, one who takes the active role in homosexual intercourse), but al-Tirmidhī pairs it rather with the same penalty for falsely calling someone a Jew.¹⁵

3. Slightly more specific information on the *mukhannathūn* is provided by a *ḥadīth* in Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/888), on the authority of Abū Hurayra, according to which, “A *mukhannath*, who had dyed his hands and feet with henna, was brought to the Prophet. The Prophet asked, ‘What is the matter with this one?’ He was told, ‘O Apostle of God, he imitates women.’ He

¹² Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, ed. A. M. Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1949–56), nos. 1982, 2006, 2123, 2291, 3458, 7842, 7878, 5649, 5328; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. L. Krehl and Th. W. Juynboll (Leiden: Brill, 1862–1908), *libās* 62 (4:94f.), *ḥudūd* 33 (4:308); Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, ed. M. M. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: Dār Ihyāʾ al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya, 1970), *adab*, no. 4930 (4:283); al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan* (Hims: Dār al-Daʿwa, 1965), *adāb* 34, no. 2786 (8:24).

¹³ Al-Bukhārī, *libās* 61 (4:94); Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, ed. M. F. ʿAbd al-Bāqī (Cairo: Maktabat ʿIsā al-Bābī, 1952–53), *nikāḥ* 22, nos. 1903–4 (1:613); al-Tirmidhī, *adāb*, no. 2785 (8:24). The primary *isnād* for both versions goes back to ʿIkrima from Ibn ʿAbbās.

¹⁴ Ibn Ḥanbal (ed. Shākir), nos. 1982, 2006, 2123; al-Bukhārī, *libās* 62 (4:94f.), *ḥudūd* 33 (4:308); Abū Dāwūd, *adab*, no. 4930 (4:283).

¹⁵ Ibn Māja, *ḥudūd* 15, no. 2568 (2:857f.); al-Tirmidhī, *ḥudūd* 29, no. 1462 (5:159). The *isnāds* are essentially identical, and go back, again, to ʿIkrima from Ibn ʿAbbās.

ordered him banished to al-Naqī^c.¹⁶ They said, 'O Apostle of God, shall we not kill him?' He replied, 'I have been forbidden to kill those who pray.'¹⁷

4. Banishment also figures in some versions of the most celebrated, and widely commented, of the *ḥadīth* on *mukhannathūn*, that concerning a person usually identified as Hīt.¹⁸ According to various authorities, Umm Salama, one of the Prophet's wives, reported that on the eve of the taking of al-Ṭā'if (8/630) the Prophet visited her while a *mukhannath* (Hīt) was also present. She heard the latter say to her brother, 'Abdallāh b. Abī Umayya, "If God grants that you take al-Ṭā'if tomorrow, go after Ghaylān's daughter; for she comes forward with four and goes away with eight!" To this the Prophet said, "Do not admit these into your (fem. pl.) presence!"¹⁹ Hīt's "four" and "eight" are explained by the commentators, at great length, as referring to the woman's belly wrinkles (*ʿukan*), four in front, whose ends can be seen wrapping around on the two sides of her back when she walks away, thus appearing to be eight.²⁰ Some versions of the *ḥadīth* give the masculine plural rather than the feminine plural pronoun in "your presence," which the commentators explain as referring collectively to the women and the underage males or eunuchs present in the women's quarters.²¹ In addition, some versions substitute "Cast

them out of your (masc. pl.) houses!" for "Do not admit these into your presence!"²² or have both phrases together.²³

5. An apparent doublet of this story is a *ḥadīth* reported from 'Ā'isha, which Ibn Ḥanbal and Muslim (d. 261/875) have preserved in the following form: "There was a *mukhannath* who used to be admitted to the presence of the Prophet's wives. He was considered one of those lacking interest in women (*min ghayr ulī l-irba*). One day the Prophet entered when this *mukhannath* was with one of his wives; he was describing a woman, and said 'When she comes forward, it is with four, and when she goes away, it is with eight.' The Prophet said, 'Oho! I think this one knows what goes on here! Do not admit him into your (fem. pl.) presence!' So he was kept out (*ḥajabūhu*)."²⁴ Abū Dāwūd supplies two additions to the story. The first states that the Prophet banished the *mukhannath*, who lived in the desert and came into Medina once a week to beg for food. According to the second, it was said to the Prophet (after the banishment), "He will die of hunger, then!" and he then permitted him to enter the city twice a week to beg and then return to the desert.²⁵

6. Finally, Ibn Māja reports on the authority of Ṣafwān b. Umayya the following *ḥadīth*, the only one to link the *mukhannathūn* with music: "We were with the Apostle of God when 'Amr b. Murra came to him and said, 'O Apostle of God, God has made misery my lot! The only way I have to earn my daily bread is with my tambourine (*duff*) in my hand; so permit me to do my singing, avoiding any immorality (*fāhisha*).' The Apostle of God replied, 'I will *not* permit you, not even as a favor! You lie, enemy of God! God has provided you with good and permissible ways to sustain yourself, but you have chosen the sustenance that God has forbidden you rather than the permissible which He has permitted you. If I had already given you prior warning, I would now be taking action against you. Leave me, and repent before God! I swear, if you do it

¹⁶ A place some three or four miles from Medina; see Yāqūt, *Muṣjam al-buldān* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1986), 5:301f.

¹⁷ Abū Dāwūd, *adab*, no. 4928 (4:282). According to a well-known *ḥadīth*, the shedding of a Muslim's blood is lawful only in cases of adultery, murder, and apostasy; see, e.g., al-Bukhārī, *diyāt* 6 (4:317).

¹⁸ Al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, 6:325, claims that the reading "Hīt" favored by the *muhaddithūn* is a mispointing for "Hinh." This view was supported by Ibn Durustawayh, according to Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-bārī* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1959), 2:331, but is contested by al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb al-lughā*, 4:325. In the canonical collections considered here, the *mukhannath* is unnamed, except by al-Bukhārī, who gives the name in the form "Hīt."

¹⁹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *maghāzī* 56 (3:150f.), *libās* 62 (4:94f.); cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Cairo, 1895), 6:290. In the event, 'Abdallāh b. Abī Umayya was killed in the battle; see Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-Ma'ārif*, ed. Th. 'Ukāsha, 4th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1981), 136.

²⁰ E.g., Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-bārī* 11:249. The ultimate source of most of these explanations is Abū 'Ubayd, *Gharīb al-ḥadīth*, 2:96–102.

²¹ Mālik b. Anas, *al-Muwattaʿ* (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā'is, 1971), no. 1453 (p. 544); Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (with *sharḥ* of al-Nawawī) (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Miṣriyya bil-Azhar, n.d.), *salām* (14:162); and cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *nikāḥ* 113 (3:454).

²² Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, *nikāḥ* 22, no. 1902 (1:613), *ḥudūd* 38, no. 2614 (2:872); Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *adab*, no. 4929 (4:283).

²³ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Cairo, 1895), 6:318. All these versions are traced back to Hishām b. 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr, from his father, from Zaynab, Umm Salama's daughter.

²⁴ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Cairo, 1895), 6:152; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *salām* (14:162f.). Abū 'Ubayd, *Gharīb al-ḥadīth*, 2:96–102, conflates the Prophet's comment in this *ḥadīth* with the circumstances of the previous one, and appeals to the phrase "*min ghayr ulī l-irba*" (from Qurʾān 24:31; see below) in his interpretation without including it in the *ḥadīth* itself.

²⁵ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *libās*, nos. 4107–10 (4:62f.). The *isnād* is from al-Zuhri from 'Urwa b. al-Zubayr from 'Ā'isha.

(*faʿalta*) after this warning to you, I will give you a painful beating, shave your head as an example, banish you from your people, and declare plunder of your property permissible to the youth of Medina!’ ‘Amr went away, burning with a grief and shame that none but God could comprehend. When he was gone, the Prophet said, ‘Any of these rebels (*ʿuṣāh*) who dies without repenting will be gathered by God on the Day of Resurrection just as he was in this world—*mukhannath*, naked, without a fringe to cover him before people, unable to stand without falling!’”²⁶

7. A final mention of *mukhannathūn* in al-Bukhārī occurs, not in a *ḥadīth*, but in an opinion (*raʾy*) by al-Zuhrī (d. 125/742), added as a supplement to a number of *ḥadīth* on the validity of a prayer led by an *imām* of questionable orthodoxy or morals, namely, that one should pray behind a *mukhannath* only in cases of necessity.²⁷

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this *ḥadīth* material, and can in turn be supplemented by further information from the commentaries, much of which is conveniently brought together in the massive commentaries on al-Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* by Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449) and al-ʿAynī (d. 855/1451). First, the *mukhannathūn* were an identifiable group of men who publicly adopted feminine adornment, at least with regard to the use of henna, and probably in clothing and jewelry as well. Al-ʿAynī quotes from al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971) the statement that in the days of the Prophet the *mukhannathūn* spoke languidly, and dyed their hands and feet (with henna), but were not accused of immoral acts (*fāḥisha*)—although they sometimes played hobbyhorse (*kurraj*), a frowned-upon frivolous activity.²⁸ According to Ibn Ḥabīb (d. 238/852), “a *mukhannath* is an effeminate (*muʿannith*) man, even if he is not known to be guilty of immoral acts, the derivation being based on the idea of languidness in gait and in other ways.”²⁹ Later com-

mentators make less historically based, but nevertheless interesting, distinctions. Al-Kirmānī (d. 786/1384), defining a *mukhannath* as a man who imitates women in his speech and acts, distinguishes between constitutional (*khilqī*) and affected (*takallufī*) effeminacy, only the latter being blameworthy.³⁰ Al-ʿAynī himself speaks specifically of imitation of women in dress and adornment (listing veils and several types of ornament as examples) and in acts, “such as languidness of body and feminine modes of speaking and walking.”³¹ Both al-ʿAynī and Ibn Ḥajar repeat al-Kirmānī’s distinction between involuntary and voluntary effeminacy, but go on to say that the man who is constitutionally, as opposed to affectedly, effeminate must make efforts (*takalluf*) to stop being so; if he does not do so, he becomes blameworthy, “especially if he seems to take pleasure in (his effeminacy).”³² Al-ʿAynī further adds that “in our time” *mukhannath* means simply the passive partner in homosexual intercourse, and makes both male and female homosexual activity a more heinous extension of *takhannuth* and *tarajjul*; he also claims that the difference between *mukhannath* and *mukhannith* (generally considered simply variants) is that the first signifies “effeminate” and the second “catamite.”³³

On the basis of the *ḥadīth* themselves, we may infer that in the first/seventh century the *mukhannathūn* were sometimes, and perhaps customarily, admitted to the women’s quarters, on the assumption that they lacked sexual interest in women. “*Ghayr ulī l-irba*” in the fifth *ḥadīth* cited above refers to Qurʾān 24:31, where a list of persons to whom women are permitted to reveal their charms includes, besides various relatives, female slaves, male retainers who lack desire (*al-tābīʿin ghayr ulī l-irba min al-rijāl*), and children. Al-ʿAynī glosses the phrase as “impotent” (*ʿinnīn*) as well as “insensitive to women’s charms.”³⁴ Nowhere in

²⁶ Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, *ḥudūd* 38, no. 2613 (2:871f.). I have not succeeded in identifying this ‘Amr b. Murra.

²⁷ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *adhān* 56 (1:181).

²⁸ Al-ʿAynī, *Umdat al-qārī* (Beirut: Muḥammad Amīn Damaj, 1970), 17:304; cf. Ibn Ḥajar, *Faṭḥ al-bārī*, 11:248. On the *kurraj*, see F. Rosenthal, tr., *The Muqaddima of Ibn Khaldūn*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967), 2:404f., and note; M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, “Sur le cheval-jupon et al-kurraj,” in *Mélanges offerts à William Marçais* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve, 1950), 155–60.

²⁹ Al-ʿAynī, *Umdat al-qārī* 20:215; Ibn Ḥajar, *Faṭḥ al-bārī* 11:248. This Ibn Ḥabīb is the Andalusian Mālikī *faqīh* and historian ‘Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb, not his better-known Iraqi contemporary, Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb (d. 245/860).

³⁰ Al-ʿAynī, *Umdat al-qārī* 22:42, and cf. 5:232f., 20:25. See also Ibn Ḥajar, *Faṭḥ al-bārī* 2:331 and 10:248.

³¹ Al-ʿAynī, *Umdat al-qārī* 22:41; cf. Ibn Ḥajar, *Faṭḥ al-bārī* 12:452.

³² Al-ʿAynī, *Umdat al-qārī* 22:41; Ibn Ḥajar, *Faṭḥ al-bārī*, 11:248 and 12:452, the latter quoting al-Nawawī (d. 676/1278).

³³ Al-ʿAynī, *Umdat al-qārī* 5:232f., 20:25; cf. Ibn Ḥajar, *Faṭḥ al-bārī* 2:331, 12:452. See also al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-arūs* 5:240ff.

³⁴ Al-ʿAynī, *Umdat al-qārī* 20:216. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* (Cairo, 1961), 19:38, gives a total of five interpretations of the phrase, including the two cited by al-ʿAynī as well as “eunuch” (*khaṣī majbūb*), “old man,” and “young slave.” The Ḥanafī *faqīh* al-Sarakhsī (d. 483/1090), in a discussion of the seclusion of women in his *Mabsūṭ* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿāda, 1906),

the early material, however, is it implied that these *mukhannathūn* were sexually interested in males. Ibn Ḥabīb in the ninth century and al-Ṭabarānī in the tenth make this distinction explicitly, thereby suggesting that by their own time assumptions had changed and *mukhannathūn* were expected to be homosexually inclined.³⁵

In the *ḥadīth* of ʿĀʾisha, the Prophet's words imply that the *mukhannath*'s awareness of what men found attractive in women was proof of his own sexual interest in them, and that it is for this reason that he and those like him should be barred from the women's quarters. The various *ḥadīth* about banishment of the *mukhannathūn*, however, go well beyond this in implying that *takhannuth* was objectionable in itself, and that the *mukhannathūn* should be banished from society altogether, not just from the women's quarters. Only these latter *ḥadīth*, it should be noted, condemn *takhannuth* as a behavioral complex in itself. But there is apparently another factor involved. In the two *ḥadīth* of Umm Salama and ʿĀʾisha, the *mukhannath* is not simply expressing his own appreciation of a woman's body, but describing it for the benefit of another man;

10:158, offers three interpretations—*majbūb*, *mukhannath*, and *ablah* ("insensitive to women's charms")—and makes a further distinction between two kinds of *mukhannath*, stating that a man who is *mukhannath* "in evil acts (*fī l-radīʾ min al-afʿāl*) is, like other men—indeed, like other sinners (*fus-sāq*)—prohibited from (being admitted to) women; as for the one whose limbs are languid and whose tongue has a lisp (*takassur*) by way of gentle natural constitution, and who has no desire for women and is not *mukhannath* in evil acts, some of our shaykhs would grant such a person license (*rakhkhaṣa*) to be with women"—on the basis of the *ḥadīth* of al-Ṭāʾif, which al-Sarakhsī cites in a version that has the Prophet remark, "I did not realize that he was acquainted with this sort of thing," the implication being that only Hīt's "obscene remark" (*kalima fāḥisha*) led to his expulsion from the women's company.

³⁵ Al-Zabīdī (*Tāj al-ʿarūs* 5:240ff.), commenting on the attempt to relate this distinction to two distinct terms *mukhannith* and *mukhannath*, states flatly that "the *takhannith* which is an act of immorality (*fīʿl al-fāḥisha*) is unknown to the (pure, original) Arabs, is not present in their language, and is not what is meant (by the word) in the *ḥadīth*." Ibn Ḥajar (*Fatḥ al-bārī* 15:174), discussing the *ḥadīth* prescribing exile for those exhibiting cross-gender behavior, which al-Bukhārī puts in his section on the *ḥudūd*, cites a legal argument for the necessity of distinguishing the *mukhannath* from the passive homosexual offender, based on the fact that the penalty for the latter, stoning, would obviate the penalty of exile.

and there is evidence, from the time of the Prophet as well as the following half century, that, because of their admission to the women's quarters (which continued despite the Prophet's reported disapproval), the *mukhannathūn* played a significant role as matchmakers for eligible bachelors with secluded women. In a non-canonical variant of the *ḥadīth* of ʿĀʾisha, the Prophet's wife asks a *mukhannath* named Annah to direct her to (*tadullunā ʿalā*, the standard verb for match-making) a suitable wife for her brother ʿAbd al-Raḥmān; and al-Muhallab explains that the Prophet "only barred (the *mukhannath*) from the women's quarters when he heard him describe the woman in this way (i.e., her belly-wrinkles) which excites the hearts of men; he forbade him (to enter) in order that he not describe (prospective) mates to people and thus nullify the point of secluding women (*al-ḥijāb*)."³⁶ It is not entirely clear, then, to what extent the *mukhannathūn* were punished for their breaking of gender rules in itself, and to what extent such measures were taken rather because of the perceived damage to social institutions from their activities as matchmakers and their corresponding access to women.

The second alternative is supported by the isolated *ḥadīth* in Ibn Māja, the sixth cited above, according to which the Prophet chastised ʿAmr b. Murra for making his living as an entertainment musician. This is the only *ḥadīth* to link the *mukhannathūn* with music, and at that only weakly, as ʿAmr is nowhere referred to directly as a *mukhannath*; on the other hand, the specific association of *mukhannathūn* with the tambourine (*duff*) is common in later reports, which might suggest anachronism here. If the Prophet found *takhannuth* shameful, his real quarrel with ʿAmr seems to have been the latter's frivolity and purveyance of music, itself thought to be a corrupter of morals.³⁷ If the

³⁶ Al-ʿAynī, *ʿUmdat al-qārī* 20:216; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-bārī* 11:250. Ibn Ḥajar adds, however, that the context gives the impression that Annah was barred also on his own account, since his words showed that he was one of the *ulū l-irba*. I have not been able to identify al-Muhallab.

³⁷ On the debates about the licitness of music, and the *ḥadīth* pro and con, see Wright, "Music and Verse," 447; J. Robson, *Tracts on Listening to Music* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1938) (translation of works by Ibn Abī l-Dunyā and Aḥmad al-Ghazālī); D. B. MacDonald, "Emotional Religion in Islam as Affected by Music and Singing," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1901: 195–252, 705–48, and 1902: 1–28 (translation of a section from Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*); L. I. al-Faruqī, "Music, Musicians and Islamic Law," *Asian Music* 17 (1985): 3–36.

mukhannathūn, or rather a few of them who took advantage of their unique social position, endangered the social fabric by breaking down appropriate barriers between men and women and inciting passions with music and with intimate descriptions of respectable ladies to perfect strangers, perhaps this would be considered reason enough for banishment.

None of our sources in fact state that Muḥammad actually banished more than two *mukhannathūn*, and there is considerable evidence that such men continued to have access to women's quarters and to describe women to other men. (On the other hand, there can be no question about the low social status of the *mukhannath*, as is clear from the second *ḥadīth* cited above, which imposes a punishment for use of the term as an insult.) The various sources marshalled by al-ʿAynī and Ibn Ḥajar give altogether five different names of *mukhannathūn* banished by Muḥammad, of which Hīt (or Hinb) is the one most often mentioned; a long discussion can be traced through the commentators over whether Hīt and Mātī^c (or Mānī^c) were two different banished *mukhannathūn* or only one with two names.³⁸ A total of six different places of banishment are mentioned as well.³⁹ A particularly elaborate version of the Ṭāʿif *ḥadīth* quoted by al-ʿAynī and Ibn Ḥajar from Ibn al-Kalbī has Hīt going beyond belly-wrinkles to give a longer and more extravagant description of the woman (to which are added glosses by Abū ʿUbayd), and the Prophet replying "You have taken too good a look, enemy of God!" and banishing him from Medina to al-Ḥimā; Ibn al-Kalbī reports further that after the Prophet's death Abū Bakr refused to reconsider the man's sentence, but ʿUmar was finally prevailed upon, when he had become old and sick, to permit him to enter the city once a week to beg.⁴⁰ A parallel but even more elaborate account, in which the *mukhannath* cites verses, appears in the *Aghānī*, likewise citing Ibn al-Kalbī, but making it ʿUthmān who finally relented and permitted the weekly visits.⁴¹

³⁸ Al-ʿAynī, *Umdat al-qārī* 20:215; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-bārī* 11:247f. Besides Hīt, Mātī^c, and Annah, al-ʿAynī mentions al-H.d.m and al-Hurr (*Umdat al-qārī* 17:304); the former appears as Harim in Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Durra al-fākhira fī l-amthāl al-sāʿira*, ed. ʿAbd al-Majīd Quṭāmish (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1971–72), 1:182.

³⁹ Al-ʿAynī, *Umdat al-qārī* 17:303f., 20:215f.; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-bārī* 11:250.

⁴⁰ Al-ʿAynī, *Umdat al-qārī* 17:303f.; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-bārī* 11:249. This longer form of the *ḥadīth* with Abū ʿUbayd's glosses does not appear in his *Gharīb al-ḥadīth*.

⁴¹ Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (Cairo, 1323/1905–6), 2:166.

As indicated by the *Aghānī* citation, the story of Hīt also entered the *adab* tradition. Al-Jāḥiẓ gives a straightforward version of it in his *Mufākharat al-jawārī wal-ghilmān*, as does Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih in the *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*.⁴² A longer version, similar to that in the *Aghānī* but even fuller, appears in Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī's book of proverbs, under the expression "more effeminate than Hīt (*akhnath min Hīt*)"; according to this version, Hīt was exiled to Khākh, where he remained until the days of ʿUthmān. Ḥamza drew material from many earlier books of proverbs, and in particular from several of the *Amthāl ʿalā afʿal* genre, and a wider search in both earlier and later *adab* literature would undoubtedly turn up many more (and varied) citations.⁴³

THE MUKHANNATHŪN AND MUSIC IN MEDINA: ṬUWAYS

Except for the reports just cited about Hīt's later years, and the *ḥadīth* which report that the Prophet and ʿUmar each banished one (anonymous) *mukhannath*, we have very little information about the *mukhannathūn* after the death of Muḥammad, until the consolidation of Marwānid rule sixty years later under ʿAbd al-Malik. But from the following period we have relatively rich sources, primarily because of the importance of a number of *mukhannathūn* in the development of Arabic song in the Hijaz at this time. The *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, by far the most important of these sources, offers extensive biographies of all the leading musicians, both male and female, who contributed to this development, including two men, Ṭuways and al-Dalāl, who were equally celebrated as *mukhannathūn*, meriting inclusion beside Hīt in the books of proverbs under the rubric "more effeminate than." From these biographies, supplemented by scattered information in

⁴² Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Mufākharat al-jawārī wa-l-ghilmān*, in *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. A. M. Hārūn (4 vols., Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1965), 2:101; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, ed. A. Amīn et al. (Cairo: Lajnat al-Taʾlīf wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1940–53), 6:105.

⁴³ Ḥamza's version is the one reproduced in later proverb books, e.g., Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, *Jamharat al-Amthāl*, ed. M. A. Ibrāhīm and ʿA. Quṭāmish (Cairo: al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiyya al-Ḥadītha lil-Ṭabʿ wa-l-nashr wa-l-tawzīʿ, 1964), 1:435f.; al-Maydānī, *Majmaʿ al-Amthāl* (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, n.d.), 1:249f.; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Mustaṣṣa fī l-amthāl* (Hyderabad: Majlis Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1962), 1:111f. This "long" version also appears (minus the poetry) in al-ʿAbī, *Nathr al-durr* (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma lil-Kitāb, 1980–), vol. 5, ed. M. I. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, 1:292, and in Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī l-taʾrīkh*, ed. C. J. Tornberg (Leiden: Brill, 1868), 2:268.

other *adab* works, it is possible to draw a rather fuller picture of the *mukhannathūn* in general, especially in Medina.

Ṭuways,⁴⁴ the older of the two, was celebrated not only for his music and his *takhannuth*, but also as a jinx—thus meriting a second entry in the proverb books, under the rubric “more unlucky than Ṭuways (*ash'am min Ṭuways*).” The explanation given of this (with a number of variants) is that he was born the day the Prophet died, weaned the day Abū Bakr died, circumcised the day ʿUmar was killed, married the day ʿUthmān was killed, and blessed with his first child the day ʿAlī was killed.⁴⁵ Born in the year 10/632, he died, according to Ibn Khallikān, in 92/711, at the age of 82 (lunar).⁴⁶ According to most accounts, his name was Abū ʿAbd al-Munʿim ʿĪsā b. ʿAbdallāh, Ṭuways (“little peacock”) being a nickname (*laqab*).⁴⁷ While the various *mukhannathūn* mentioned from the time of the Prophet in the *ḥadīth* all have regular given names (*asmāʾ*), albeit mostly quite unusual ones, after Ṭuways the adoption of fanciful *laqabs* seems to have become standard practice among the *mukhannathūn* of Me-

dina. The other *mukhannathūn* are said also to have changed Ṭuways’s *kunya* to Abū ʿAbd al-Naʿīm, apparently in reference to the frivolity and hedonism normally associated with the *mukhannath*. Ṭuways was a client (*mawlā*) of the Banu Makhzūm;⁴⁸ *mawlā* status seems in fact to have been usual among *mukhannathūn* both earlier and later.

According to the *Aghānī*, Ṭuways was the first of the *mukhannathūn* to sing “art music” (? *ghināʾ mutqan*), and the first person to compose in the “lighter” rhythms of *hazaj* and *ramal* in Islam—in fact, he is mentioned in yet a third proverbial expression, “better at *hazaj* than Ṭuways (*ahzaj min Ṭuways*).”⁴⁹ Elsewhere, Abū l-Faraj reports rather that Ṭuways was the first person to sing in Arabic in Medina, and also the first to flaunt publicly his effeminacy (? *alqā l-khanath*) there; or again that he was the first in Medina to sing in measured rhythm (*ghināʾ yadkhulu fī l-iqāʿ*).⁵⁰ Al-Nuwayrī in his *Nihāyat al-arab* attempts to rework the information provided in the *Aghānī* on early Arabic song into a rough chronology, which he begins with three men, naming Saʿīd b. Misjah, a black *mawlā* in Mecca, and Sāʿib Kāthir, a *mawlā* who settled in Medina, as well as Ṭuways.⁵¹ The first two, neither of whom is ever called a *mukhannath*, are said to have been active in the days of Muʿāwīya (41–60/661–80). All three men trained pupils who were to become the leading musicians of the next generation. They differed from one another in the instruments they employed, as well as in their styles of music, although the exact meanings of the technical terms specifying these styles are difficult to interpret.⁵² Sāʿib Kāthir introduced the *ūd* to Medina, while Ṭuways relied exclusively on the *duff*, a

⁴⁴ He has, uniquely and inexplicably, two biographies in the *Aghānī* (2:164–72, 4:37–39). Despite the fact that the former gives his real name as ʿĪsā, while according to the latter it was Ṭāwūs, the general congruence of the two accounts rules out the possibility that they refer to two different people.

⁴⁵ Al-Mufaḍḍal b. Salama, *al-Fākhīr*, ed. C. A. Storey (Leiden: Brill, 1915), 85; Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 1:185f.; Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, *Jamharat al-amthāl* 1:436f.; al-Thaʿālibī, *Thimār*, 145f.; al-Maydānī, *Majmaʿ al-amthāl* 1:258f.; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Mustaḥṣā* 1:109f. See also *Aghānī* 2:165, 4:38, and the biographies in Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān*, ed. I. ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 3:506f.; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab* (Cairo: al-Muʾassasa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma lil-taʿlīf wa-l-tarjama wa-l-ṭibāʿa wa-l-nashr, n.d.), 4:246–49; al-Kutubī, *Fawāʾ al-wafayāt*, ed. I. ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 2:137f.; and al-Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfī bil-wafayāt*, vol. 16, ed. W. al-Qādī (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1982), 501f., with further references to later biographical works.

⁴⁶ Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān* 3:506, repeated in al-Kutubī, *Fawāʾ al-wafayāt* 2:137, both without indication of source. According to *Aghānī* 2:166, he died in the caliphate of al-Walīd (86–96/705–15).

⁴⁷ *Aghānī* 2:164. But according to *Aghānī* 4:37, his real name was Ṭāwūs, and Ḥamza, *Durra* 1:185, also gives him the name Ṭāwūs, changed to Ṭuways “*lammā takhannatha*” (so also in al-Jawharī, *Ṣiḥāh*, 941f.). A very brief notice in Ibn Qutayba, *Maʿārif*, 322, says his name was ʿAbd al-Malik. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt* 3:506, notes these variant reports.

⁴⁸ Ibn Qutayba, *Maʿārif*, 322 (see previous note) makes him a *mawlā* of Arwā bt. Kurayz, the mother of the caliph ʿUthmān.

⁴⁹ *Aghānī* 4:37. There is probably a reference to a particular vocal quality or technique here; E. W. Lane defines *hazij* as “a singer . . . who prolongs his voice, with trilling, or quavering, making the sounds to follow close, one upon another” (*Arabic-English Lexicon* [Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1984], s.v.).

⁵⁰ *Aghānī* 2:165. For other versions of Ṭuways as “first” singer see Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *ʿIqd* 6:27; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Maḥāsīn wa-l-masāwī*, ed. M. A. Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Maktabat Nahḍat Miṣr, n.d.), 2:71; Ḥamza, *Durra*, 1:185; Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, *Kitāb al-Awāʾil*, ed. M. al-Miṣrī and W. Qaṣṣāb (Damascus: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa-l-Irshād al-Qawmī, 1975), 2:161–66.

⁵¹ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* 4:239–48.

⁵² See Wright, “Music and Verse,” 435–44.

square tambourine, and sang “lighter” songs, both characteristic of later *mukhannathūn* as well. One of Sāʿib Kāthir’s pupils, ʿAzza al-Maylāʿ, is called by Abū l-Faraj the first woman to sing in measured rhythm (? *al-ghināʿ al-mūqaʿ*) in the Hijaz; although she is also said to have sung the songs of the earlier slave girls (*aghānī al-qiyān min al-qadāʾim*), none of the names mentioned of the latter recur elsewhere in the *Aghānī*.⁵³ In general, while our contradictory sources do not give us a clear picture of the earliest developments of Arabic song, these indications seem to offer little support for a chronological progression of singers from women to *mukhannathūn* to other men, as suggested by Wright.⁵⁴

Music was very much part of the frivolity and high living which our sources describe in the Holy Cities in the years after the final defeat of Ibn al-Zubayr, and of which the poet ʿUmar b. Abī l-Rabīʿa is the best-known representative.⁵⁵ Bon vivants such as ʿAbdallāh b. Jaʿfar b. Abī Ṭālib and, especially, Ibn Abī ʿAtīq, a great-grandson of the caliph Abū Bakr, patronized musicians, and defended music against the strictures of the pious, as well as those of the caliph himself and his governors in Medina.⁵⁶ While some anecdotes indicate a general disapproval of singing by the aristocracy (*ashraf*) of the city, numerous others tell of Ṭuways being asked to sing by groups of young men (*fityān*) from Quraysh, apparently his most appreciative audience; there seems to have been a generational split on the question. These young men sometimes invited Ṭuways to entertain them at pleasure parties in the “parks” (*muntazahāt*) outside Medina. They seem to

have appreciated his wit and charm as much as his music, but held more mixed opinions about his *takhan-nuth*. Here is how one authority describes him:⁵⁷

A group of people in Medina were one day talking about the city, and Ṭuways’ name came up for discussion. One man said, “If you had seen him, you would have been impressed by his knowledge, his elegance, his singing, and his skill with the *duff*. He could make a bereaved mother laugh!” But another said, “Still, he was ill-omened”—and he told the story of his birth, etc. . . .—“and, on top of that, he was a *mukhannath*, who would try to trip us up and make us stumble.”⁵⁸ He was tall, ungainly, and wall-eyed.” Then another, from the midst of the group, said, “If he was as you say, he was nevertheless diverting, astute, respectful to anyone who treated him with appropriate politeness, and quick to be of service; but he refused to listen to anyone who granted him less than equal respect. He was a great partisan of his patrons, the Banū Makhzūm, and their allies among the Quraysh, but behaved peaceably toward their enemies and avoided provoking them. One cannot blame someone who speaks with knowledge and astuteness. ‘Blame to the wrong-doer, and the initiator does more wrong!’” Yet another said, “If what you say is true, then the Quraysh should have crowded around him, enjoyed his company, eagerly listened to his speech, and clamored for his singing. His downfall was his *khunth*; were it not for that, there is not one of the Quraysh, or the Anṣār, or anyone else, who would have failed to welcome him.”

Another anecdote shows a similar difference of opinion, as well as illustrating Ṭuways’ sharp tongue. ʿAbdallāh b. Jaʿfar was enjoying a spring evening with some companions in the *muntazah* of al-ʿAqīq, when they were overtaken by a shower. He proposed that they take refuge with Ṭuways, near whose residence they were standing, and enjoy his conversation, but ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. Ḥassān b. Thābit objected, saying, “With all due respect, what do you want with Ṭuways? He is under the wrath of God, a *mukhannath* whom it is shameful to know.” ʿAbdallāh replied, “Don’t say that! He is a witty, delightful person, and will give us good company.” Overhearing this conversation, Ṭuways instructed his wife to cook a goat and ran to invite the party in. After serving them a princely dinner,

⁵³ *Aghānī* 16:12f.

⁵⁴ For attempts to reconstruct the earliest period of Arabic music, see H. G. Farmer, *A History of Arabian Music* (London: Luzac, 1929); N. Asad, *al-Qiyān wal-ghināʿ fī l-ʿaṣr al-jāhili* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1969); A. Shiloah, “Music in the Pre-Islamic Period As Reflected in Arabic Writings of the First Islamic Centuries,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 7 (1986): 109–20.

⁵⁵ See R. Blachère, *Histoire de la littérature arabe des origines à la fin du XV^e siècle de J.-C.* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1952–66), 661–716; Dayf, *al-Shiʿr wal-ghināʿ fī l-Madīna wa-Makka li-ʿaṣr Banī Umayya*; J.-Cl. Vadet, *L’Ésprit courtois en Orient dans les cinq premiers siècles de l’Hégire* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1968), 61–158.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *Iqd* 6:55f.; also al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil fī l-lughā wa-l-adab* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Maʿārif, 1985), 1:380; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *Iqd* 6:49f.; al-Ḥuṣṣrī, *Jamʿ al-jawāhir*, ed. ʿA. M. al-Bijāwī (Cairo: ʿIsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1953), 54f.; *Aghānī* 8:9f.

⁵⁷ *Aghānī* 2:165.

⁵⁸ *Yakīdunā wa-yaḥlubu ʿatharātīnā*. On the *kayd* or *kiyād* of the *mukhannathūn*, see note 135 below.

he offered to sing and dance for the company, and was encouraged to do so. They were delighted with his song and praised its verses, but then ʿTuways asked them if they knew who had composed them. When they said no, he revealed that they were love verses written by Ḥassān b. Thābit's sister about a prominent Makhzūmī, and thus took his revenge on ʿAbdallāh b. Ḥassān b. Thābit, who was mortified.⁵⁹

Tuways showed himself more conciliatory in a similar account, which links him with the earlier *mukhannath* Hīt. With an audience that included the son of ʿAbdallāh b. Abī Umayya, to whom Hīt had made his unfortunate matchmaking proposal, ʿTuways sang the very verses with which Hīt had praised the proposed bride of al-Ṭāʾif. Although pressed to stop, ʿTuways insisted on completing the song, but then promised ʿAbdallāh's son that he would never sing it again if it angered him. Abū l-Faraj links these two anecdotes by making Hīt the *mawlā* of ʿAbdallāh and suggesting that ʿTuways owed his *khunth* in some way to association with Hīt.⁶⁰

Our sources offer very little information on the outward manifestations of this *takhannuth*. Perhaps relevant here is a joke in Ibn Qutayba's *Kitāb al-Maʿārif*, according to which ʿTuways was seen performing the pilgrimage rite at Minā of throwing stones at a stone representing the devil—but he had coated the stones with sugar and saffron. Questioned on this, he replied, “I owed the devil a favor, and I’m making up for it.”⁶¹ More concrete are two accounts which associate *takhannuth* with irreligion and frivolity, and show an ambivalence toward it on the part of the government similar to that it displayed toward music. When Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥakam was ʿAbd al-Malik's governor over Medina (75–76/694–95),⁶² he noticed a suspicious-looking character and had him hauled before him. The man

had the appearance of a woman: he was wearing fine dyed garments, and had dressed his hair and applied henna to his hands. He was identified to the governor as Ibn Nughāsh the *mukhannath*. The governor said, “I doubt that you ever read the Qurʾān. Recite the Mother of the Qurʾān!”⁶³ Ibn Nughāsh replied, “O Father, if I knew the mother, I would know the daughters!” Outraged at this irreverence, Yaḥyā had him executed, and put a bounty of three hundred dirhams on the other *mukhannathūn*. The narrator subsequently found ʿTuways entertaining a party. Informed of the news, ʿTuways sang verses deriding the governor, and complained that he had not had a higher bounty placed on him than did the others.⁶⁴

We hear no more about this policy or its effect on the *mukhannathūn*, and a year later Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥakam was replaced by Abān b. ʿUthmān.⁶⁵ As the latter approached Medina to take up his office, the townspeople and their leaders went out to meet him. ʿTuways was among them, and when he saw Abān he said, “O amīr, I swore to God that if I saw you become amīr I would dye my hands and arms with henna up to the elbows and strut with my tambourine,” and proceeded to do so, delighting the new governor with his singing. The latter cried, “Enough, Ṭāwūs!” addressing him by the non-diminutive form of his *laqab* out of respect. He seated ʿTuways beside him, then said, “They claim you are an unbeliever.” ʿTuways replied with the confession of faith and the assertion that he observed the five prayers, the fast of Ramaḍān, and the pilgrimage. When the governor (tactlessly?) asked ʿTuways whether he or the governor's (elder) brother ʿAmr was older, he replied, “I was trailing at the heels of the women of my people who accompanied your blessed mother's wedding procession to your good father.”⁶⁶

All of this anecdotal material is too riddled with variants and chronological improbabilities to warrant belief in the historicity of any single account. A variant of the bounty story, for example, is assigned by Ibn al-Kalbī to the much earlier governorship of Yaḥyā's

⁵⁹ *Aghānī* 2:167, followed by another version, which also appears in Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *ʿIqd* 6:28f. The story may hinge in part on political rivalries between the Anṣār, among whom the family of Ḥassān b. Thābit was prominent, and the Banū Makhzūm (of whom ʿTuways was a *mawlā*). Cf. a similar anecdote in Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *ʿIqd* 6:29; Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, ed. Y. ʿA. Ṭawīl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1986), 1:441f.; idem, *Maʿārif*, 294.

⁶⁰ *Aghānī* 2:167. The text is obscure and possibly corrupt: “*wa-kāna Hīt mawlan li-ʿAbdallāh . . . wa-kāna ʿTuways lahu fa-min thamma qīla (l. qabila) al-khunth*. ʿAbdallāh b. Abī Umayya was a Makhzūmī.

⁶¹ Ibn Qutayba, *Maʿārif*, 322. For other versions of this story, see p. 685 below.

⁶² Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wal-mulūk* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1960–69), 6:202, 209, 256.

⁶³ That is, the first *sūra*.

⁶⁴ *Aghānī* 2:166.

⁶⁵ Governor from 76/695 to 82/701; see al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 6:256, 355.

⁶⁶ *Aghānī* 4:38; cf. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *ʿIqd* 2:424, 4:27f. Al-Jāḥiẓ mentions the last part of this anecdote, pointing out ʿTuways' delicacy in avoiding the (expected?) locution “your good mother” (and “your blessed father”), which could be taken as a double entendre (*al-Bayān wa-l-tabayn*, ed. A. M. Hārūn [Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānī, n.d.], 1:263f.; cf. idem, *al-Ḥayawān*, ed. A. M. Hārūn [Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1965–69], 4:58).

brother Marwān, under the caliph Mu^cāwīya, and Ibn al-Kalbī claims that at that time Ṭuways went into self-imposed exile at al-Suwaydā⁷, two nights' journey north of Medina, where he spent the rest of his life.⁶⁷ Compatible with this is Ibn al-Kalbī's version of the account of the verses by Ḥassān b. Thābit's sister, which makes Ḥassān's grandson Ṭuways' target, and sets the scene at al-Suwaydā⁷, under the governorship of ^cUmar b. ^cAbd al-^cAzīz (87–93/706–12).⁶⁸ Despite such inconsistencies, however, I think we can accept the general picture drawn of Ṭuways, as the most prominent example, and perhaps in some sense leader, of a group of male professional musicians who publicly adopted women's fashions and were appreciated by many for their wit and charm as well as their music, but were disapproved of by others who, in varying degrees, saw their music, their *takhannuth*, and their flippant style as immorality and irreligion. They were also subject to varying degrees of repression by the state. References to a role as matchmaker are lacking in the case of Ṭuways, as are any references to homosexuality, or indeed to sex at all.⁶⁹ It may be noted in passing that Ṭuways is reported to have married and fathered children.⁷⁰

OTHER *MUKHANNATH* MUSICIANS IN MEDINA AND MECCA

A lengthy anecdote in Abū l-Faraj's biography of the songstress Jamīla, while historically implausible (as he himself points out), illustrates the role of the *mukhan-*

⁶⁷ *Aghānī* 2:166; the other *mukhannath* is here named al-Nughāshī, and the bounty specified as ten dinars. According to Yāqūt, *Mu^cjam al-buldān* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 3:228, Ṭuways died and was buried in Suqyā al-Jazl, a place somewhere near the Wādī al-Qurā, north of Medina; cf. idem, *al-Mushtarik*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Göttingen: Dieterichschen Verlag, 1846), 250, and Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt* 3:507.

⁶⁸ *Aghānī* 2:168, and Ibn ^cAbd Rabbihi, *Iqd* 6:28f.; cf. note 59 above. An appended report asserting that these verses were by "Ibn Zuhayr *al-mukhannath*" (rather than Ḥassān's sister herself?) is probably garbled from an attribution of the *song* to this Ibn Zuhayr; cf. Ibn Khurraḍādhbih, *Mukhtār Kitāb al-Lahw wa-l-malāhī*, ed. A. Khalifé, in *al-Machriq* 54 (1960): 151, where the verses, attributed to Ḥassān's sister, are quoted as a famous song by the Medinese *mukhannath* Ṣāliḥ b. Zuhayr al-Khuzā^cī. On ^cUmar b. ^cAbd al-^cAzīz's tenure as governor of Medina and Mecca, see al-Ṭabarī, *Ta^rīkh* 6:427, 481f.

⁶⁹ A single exception will be dealt with below, p. 686.

⁷⁰ In the story of his *shu^m*. The anecdote with ^cAbdallāh b. Ja^cfar and ^cAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥassān b. Thābit also refers to his wife (*Aghānī* 2:167).

nathūn of Medina as a distinct group among the musicians of the Hijaz, while never using the word. Jamīla was a Medinese who owed her start in the profession to being a neighbor of Sā⁷ib Kāthir, and became the principal teacher of Ma^cbad, the most famous singer of the next generation.⁷¹ According to the story,⁷² she once went on pilgrimage, taking with her all the principal Medinese singers, of both sexes, as well as the principal poets and other luminaries, including Ibn Abī ^cAtīq. Arriving in Mecca in grand procession, these were met by an equally dazzling assemblage of the most famous musicians and poets in that city, including in particular ^cUmar b. Abī Rabī^ca. After performing the pilgrimage rites, Jamīla was asked to organize a concert (*majlis lil-ghinā⁷*), but refused to mix the serious and the frivolous (*jidd* and *hazl*). ^cUmar b. Abī Rabī^ca then resolved to return with her to Medina, and in the event all the prominent Meccans joined the Medinese on their return, in a yet statelier procession than the first. ^cUmar then arranged for all to convene at Jamīla's house for three days of song.⁷³

Jamīla opened the proceedings by singing some verses by ^cUmar, and then called on the other singers, one by one. On the first day, thirteen male singers performed, Meccans alternating with Medinese. On the second day, it was the turn of "Ṭuways and his companions." All these were Medinese, whose names were included in the earlier list of participants in the pilgrimage procession, but grouped separately from the other Medinese male musicians. The eight names given are: Hīt, Ṭuways, al-Dalāl, Bard al-Fu⁷ād ("coolness/contentment of the heart"), Nawmat al-Ḍuḥā ("morning nap"), Qand ("candy"),⁷⁴ Raḥma, and Hibat-allāh. Ṭuways was called on to sing first, then al-Dalāl. Hīt was exempted on account of his advanced age. (This detail is apparently a concession to chronological plausibility, despite the otherwise drastic chronological telescoping of the story.) Then Bard al-Fu⁷ād and Nawmat al-Ḍuḥā performed together, and the last three as a group. Finally, on the third day, eleven women performed, and the grand occasion closed with a song sung by all in unison.

Although they are nowhere in this account so identified, the singers of the second day undoubtedly represent the *mukhannathūn* of Medina. All but two of

⁷¹ *Aghānī* 7:118ff.; *El* 2, s.v. "Djamīla."

⁷² *Aghānī* 7:128–33; cf. al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* 5:44ff.

⁷³ From the *Aghānī*'s statement that, at the end of the first day's concert, the *amma* left, while the *khāṣṣa* remained, it appears that this was a public event.

⁷⁴ This *laqab* is, however, probably to be emended to the *ism* Find; see below, p. 687, n. 124.

them are in fact so described in other sources, and the gratuitous and anachronistic inclusion of Hīt, who is nowhere else associated with music and even here does not sing, confirms that *takhannuth* is essential to the identity of these musicians as a distinct group.⁷⁵ Their placement between the other men and the women is certainly a reflection of their ambiguous gender status, although one version of the story has it that Jamīla had “Ṭuways and his companions” and “Ibn Surayj and his companions” draw lots for the first day, with the latter winning.⁷⁶ Noteworthy, too, is the fact that the *mukhannathūn*, like the women, are known by nicknames (*alqāb*), in contrast to all but one of the other men, suggesting that the *mukhannathūn* shared with the women the kind of inferior status which permitted relative familiarity in address and general social intercourse.

The one participant from the first day who is known by a *laqab*, al-Gharīd, was, however, apparently also a *mukhannath*—as was, according to some accounts, his master Ibn Surayj.⁷⁷ Their participation on the first day, rather than the second, would seem to rule out a distinction between the two groups exclusively on the basis of *takhannuth*; on the other hand, both men were Meccans, and our sources give no indication of the existence in Mecca of any wider, high-profile group of *mukhannathūn*, musical or otherwise, comparable to what we hear of in Medina. The concocter of the Jamīla anecdote may simply have been unaware of reports of the *takhannuth* of Ibn Surayj and al-Gharīd (which does not loom very large in their biographies in the *Aghānī*); or, plausibly, the *mukhannathūn* of Medina may have developed a musical style that set them apart from the other male musicians, one which the Meccan *mukhannathūn* did not share.

There is in any case evidence that the songs of the *mukhannathūn* were, in some way, recognizable as such. Ṭuways’ preference for the *duff* and for the “lighter” rhythms of *hazaj* and *ramal* was shared by al-Dalāl, in particular, as well as his other *mukhan-*

nathūn pupils. In a sequel to the account of Ṭuways’ impertinent singing before ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Ḥassān of verses by his aunt, Ṭuways, al-Dalāl, and an otherwise unknown *mukhannath* named al-Walīd are said to have been together at a wedding when ‘Abd al-Rahmān arrived. Seeing them, the latter said, “I will not sit in company that includes these.” But when Ṭuways acknowledged his earlier offense, and al-Dalāl lightened the atmosphere with a song in *hazaj*, accompanied by all three *mukhannathūn* on their tambourines, ‘Abd al-Rahmān agreed to stay.⁷⁸ In another anecdote, Ibn Abī ‘Atīq praises specifically al-Dalāl’s “light” (*khafīf*) rendition of some verses by al-Aḥwas, as opposed to the “heavy” style (*thaqīl*).⁷⁹ Less clear is the statement that al-Dalāl sang only “doubled” songs (*ghinā’ muḍa‘af*), glossed in our source as “*kathīr al-‘amal*” (carefully composed? complex?).⁸⁰ But a special “*mukhannath*” style of singing does seem to be implied by another anecdote; praised for his setting of verses by al-Nābigha, in which he is said to have outdone Ibn Surayj, al-Dalāl responded, “And there is in it something yet greater than that!” and when asked what, replied, “Reputation (*sum‘a*)! Anyone who hears this will know that it is by a *mukhannath* in truth!”⁸¹ A full generation later, in the early ‘Abbāsid period, *mukhannathūn* were still associated with *hazaj* and with the *duff*.⁸²

Where the two Meccan *mukhannathūn*, Ibn Surayj and al-Gharīd, fit in this picture is unclear. According

⁷⁸ *Aghānī* 4:65.

⁷⁹ This anecdote appears in many sources, with numerous variants; it is usually presented as a sequel to the castration story discussed below. See al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil* 1:395f.; Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi, *Iqd* 6:50; Ḥamza, *Durra* 1:188; *Aghānī* 4:62 (two versions, one of which opposes *hazaj* rather than *khafīf* to *thaqīl*); Abū Aḥmad al-‘Askarī, *Sharḥ mā yaqa‘u fīhi l-taṣḥīf wa-l-tahrīf*, ed. S. M. Yūsuf (Damascus: Majma‘ al-Lughā al-‘Arabiyya, 1978), 1:54–56; al-Ābī, *Nathr al-durr*, vol. 7, ed. U. Būghānimī (Tūnis, 1983), 221; al-Ḥuṣrī, *Jam‘ al-jawāhir*, 51; al-Maydānī, *Majma‘ al-amthāl* 1:251.

⁸⁰ *Aghānī* 4:59.

⁸¹ *Aghānī* 4:63.

⁸² *Aghānī* 6:64; 4:169f. In his *Gharīb al-ḥadīth* (3:64), Abū ‘Ubayd refers to the *duff* as “that which women beat,” but does not mention *mukhannathūn*; on the other hand, the association of the latter with the *duff* is still attested in the fifth/eleventh century by al-‘Utbī, who describes captives after a defeat being met in Bukhara by *makhānūth* bearing *dufūf* and spindles (al-Manīnī, *Sharḥ al-Yamīnī* [Cairo: Jam‘iyyat al-Ma‘ārif, 1869], 1:139).

⁷⁵ All these names are attested also in other anecdotes, except Raḥma (who appears as “Zujja” [?]) in the parallel to this account in al-Nuwayrī).

⁷⁶ This version is juxtaposed by the *Aghānī* with another version that has Ṭuways protesting Jamīla’s organization of the event and, by implication, his and his companions’ relegation to the second day. As in the anecdotes cited above, Ṭuways seems here to be insisting, against widespread prejudice, on his equality of status with other men.

⁷⁷ *Aghānī* 1:95, 105, 2:125ff.

to one account in the *Aghānī*, both men began as professional lamenters (*nāʿīh*), an activity traditionally restricted to women. Confronted with the younger al-Gharīd's competition, Ibn Surayj switched to conventional singing (*ghināʾ*); but then al-Gharīd followed suit. Another version reports that Ibn Surayj, noting the similarity of al-Gharīd's singing style to lamentation (*nawh*), himself turned to (the lighter) *ramal* and *hazaj*. Accused then by al-Gharīd of corrupting song, he retorted, "You, you *mukhannath*—may you sing laments over your mother and father—you say this to me!" and swore to sing the "heaviest" song ever heard. Both men, it should be noted, performed with the *ūd*, unlike the *mukhannathūn* of Medina.⁸³

Apart from questions of musical style, additional information on the appearance and behavior of the *mukhannathūn* is offered by our sources in their biographies of al-Dalāl, the third *mukhannath*, after Hīt and Ṭuways, whom the Medinese included among the sophisticates (*zurafāʾ*) and wits (*aṣḥāb nawādir*) to whom they pointed with pride.⁸⁴ Al-Dalāl's real name was Nāfid, his *kunya* was Abū Yazīd, and like his master Ṭuways he was a *mawlā*.⁸⁵ The *laqab* al-Dalāl ("coquetry") is explained as referring to his physical beauty and the charm of his manner; but the wit which constituted much of the latter was often crude, and he

was also criticized in some quarters for his profligacy (*mujūn*) and flippancy (*safah*).⁸⁶ A story that he farted during prayers and said, "I praise Thee fore and aft!" is typical; according to another account, when the *imām* recited, "And why should I not serve Him Who created me?"⁸⁷ he said, "I don't know," and caused most of the assembled worshippers to laugh and invalidate their prayer.⁸⁸

More serious, in the eyes of some, were al-Dalāl's activities as a go-between, about which we have a number of anecdotes (in notable contrast to Ṭuways).⁸⁹ While some of these stories, such as the account of his role in the marriage of ʿAbdallāh b. Jaʿfar's daughter to the governor al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf,⁹⁰ imply no impropriety, others depict al-Dalāl as encouraging immodesty and immorality among women. Of particular interest is one which mentions al-Dalāl as a close associate to two of the most profligate women in Medina (they are said to have indulged in horse-racing and while riding to have shown their ankle-bracelets), one of whom was the daughter of Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥakam. When Yaḥyā's brother Marwān, the governor, was instructed by the caliph Muʿāwīya to do something about his niece's behavior, he used trickery to bring about her death. He also pursued al-Dalāl, who fled to Mecca. There he was reproached by the women, who said, "After killing the women of Medina you have come to kill us!" He retorted, "Nothing killed them but the Tempter(?)"⁹¹ When they warned him with threats to stay away from them, he said, "Who then will diagnose your illness and know where to find the proper

⁸³ *Aghānī* 1:95–97, 124f.; according to some reports, Ibn Surayj's instrument was the *qaḍīb*, a percussion instrument. I am not sure of the implications of the reply by Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (d. 188/804) to the question who was the best singer, "Of the men, Ibn Muḥriz, and of the women, Ibn Surayj" (*Aghānī* 1:96); another version of this story adds that "It is said that the best male singers are those who imitate (*ta-shabbaha bi-*) women, and the best female singers are those who imitate men" (*Aghānī* 1:119). It would be tempting to speculate that the *mukhannathūn* sang in falsetto, but I have found no evidence for this; from a century later we are told that Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī's son Iṣḥāq (d. 235/850) compensated for some natural defect in his voice by inventing the technique of *takhnīth*, which E. Neubauer translates "Kopfstimme"; see *Aghānī* 5:75, 96, and E. Neubauer, *Musiker am Hof der frühen Abbāsiden* (Frankfurt am Main: Diss. J. W. Goethe-Universität, 1965), 25.

⁸⁴ *Aghānī*, 4:59.

⁸⁵ *Aghānī* 4:59; Ḥamza, *Durra* 1:186. Variants in: Ibn Khurrādādhbih, *Mukhtār* 149 (Abū Zayd Nāfid); al-Maydānī, *Majmaʿ* 1:251 (Abū Zayd Nāfidh); al-Zamakhsharī, *Mustaqṣā* 1:109 (Abū Yazīd Nāfidh); al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* 4:298 (Abū Zayd Nāqid).

⁸⁶ *Aghānī* 4:59, 64.

⁸⁷ Qurʾān 36:22.

⁸⁸ *Aghānī* 4:62, 64.

⁸⁹ The possibility of vocalizing his *laqab* as al-Dallāl, "marriage broker," is ruled out implicitly by the *Aghānī* (see note 85) and explicitly by Ibn Mākūlā, *al-Ikmāl* (Hyderabad: Majlis Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1962), 3:343–46, and Ibn Ḥajar, *Tabṣīr al-muntabih*, ed. ʿA. M. al-Bijāwī (Cairo: al-Muʾassasa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma lil-Taʾlīf wa-l-Anbāʾ wa-l-Nashr, n.d.), 564. The proverb books (Ḥamza, Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, al-Maydānī, al-Zamakhsharī) give the *laqab* without the article.

⁹⁰ *Aghānī* 4:70. The marriage was short-lived; see *Aghānī* 13:102f. Al-Ḥajjāj was governor of Medina in 74–75/693–94; see al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 6:195, 202, 209.

⁹¹ *Al-Ḥakkāk*, literally, "scratcher." The lexicographers define *ḥakkākāt* as the devil's whisperings in the heart. Perhaps the correct reading is simply *al-ḥukkām*, "the authorities."

treatment? By God, I have never been guilty of fornication, nor of submitting to a fornicator! I have no desire for what the men and women of your city lust after!"⁹²

Al-Dalāl seems here to be referring to his activity as a go-between, while absolving himself of responsibility for its consequences. His claims about his own behavior are less clear. He might mean that he has neither committed nor been tempted by illicit sexual conduct; or that he lacks sexual desire altogether;⁹³ or, indeed, that he had nothing to do with specifically heterosexual, as opposed to homosexual, behavior.⁹⁴ All of these alternatives are compatible with the statement that al-Dalāl "adored women and loved to be with them; but any demands (by them for his sexual favors) were in vain."⁹⁵ But it is the third—an exclusively homosexual orientation—which is supported by another story, set at the time of the caliph Hishām's pilgrimage to Mecca.⁹⁶ One of Hishām's Syrian commanders, lodged in Medina near al-Dalāl's home, overhears his singing and accepts an invitation to visit him, bringing along two servant boys. He is ravished by al-Dalāl's first song, but the latter refuses to sing another until he agrees to sell him one of the boys, which he does with alacrity. The commander then tells al-Dalāl, whom he calls a "beautiful man" (*ayyuhā l-rajul al-jamīl*), that he is looking for a slave-girl of a particular—and very voluptuous—description. Al-Dalāl replies, "I have just

the girl!" and offers to arrange a viewing, in return for being made a gift of the other boy, to which the commander again agrees with alacrity. Al-Dalāl then goes to one of the respectable ladies of Medina and asks her help, describing his infatuation with the two servant boys and maintaining that only her daughter fits the commander's description; there is no real danger involved, since the second boy is to be given up after a viewing of the girl, not after the sale. The commander is allowed to see the girl, naked, and touch her; but when he makes a specific offer, the mother reveals her identity and that of her daughter and heaps scorn on the commander as a typical representative of the "crudeness of the Syrians" (*ghilaṣ ahl al-Shām wa-jafā'uhum*).⁹⁷

More explicit testimony to this aspect of al-Dalāl's shameless behavior (*mujūn*) comes from an account of his accompanying a party of young men of Quraysh on one of their pleasure excursions outside the city.⁹⁸ Among them was a good-looking boy to whom al-Dalāl was attracted. This attraction was noticed by the party, who congratulated themselves, saying, "Now we have him for the entire day!" (The explanation for this is that al-Dalāl was always impatient to get away, finding men's conversation tiresome and much preferring that of women.) When they winked at the boy, al-Dalāl noticed, and, angry, rose to depart; but they persuaded him to stay and sing, and then brought out wine and began to drink, plying al-Dalāl with wine as well. Their exuberance attracted the attention of the authorities, who arrived as they fled. All escaped except for al-Dalāl and the boy, who were too drunk to move, and were brought before the governor (unnamed). Al-Dalāl's impudent responses to the governor are classic *mujūn*: when the latter bursts out, "You wanton degenerate (*fāsiq*)!" he replies, "From your lips to heaven!"⁹⁹ To the command, "Slap his jaw, (guards)!" he retorts, "And cut off his head, too! (?)"¹⁰⁰ The governor asks, "Enemy of God, were you not comfortable enough at home, so that you had to go out into the desert with this boy and do your foul business there?" Al-Dalāl answers, "If I had known that you were going to attack us, preferring that we do our foul business

⁹² *Aghānī* 4:63. The anecdote seems improbably early for al-Dalāl, and it would be tempting to move it forward to the governorship of Yahyā b. al-Ḥakam himself, under 'Abd al-Malik. On the other hand, Marwān is reported elsewhere to have been particularly severe toward people of loose morals; see p. 687 below.

⁹³ In contrast to Ṭuways, none of the anecdotes about al-Dalāl I have seen mention his wife; but this cannot be taken as evidence that he did not have one.

⁹⁴ Al-Dalāl's statement that "*mā zanaytu qaṭṭu wa-lā zuniya bī*" is problematical. The passive verb would seem to imply a passive role in (necessarily) homosexual intercourse; the latter, however, would not ordinarily be called *zinā*, but *liwāṭ*. Since, however, the verb is negated, perhaps he means simply that, not being a woman, he has not submitted to fornication as a woman (unlike, he implies, his interlocutors).

⁹⁵ *Aghānī* 4:59. The phrase is, however, obscure and the reading uncertain: *wa-kāna yuṭlabu (yaṭlubu?) fa-lā yuqdaru (yaqdiru?) 'alayhi*. Another possibility would be "he attempted (to have intercourse with them) but was incapable of doing so."

⁹⁶ The only pilgrimage by Hishām reported by al-Ṭabarī was in the year 106/725 (*Ta'rikh* 7:35f.).

⁹⁷ *Aghānī* 4:67f.

⁹⁸ *Aghānī* 4:64f.

⁹⁹ That is, "May your prayer be answered!"

¹⁰⁰ Literally, "strike his neck, too!": *qāla ji'ū fakkahu qāla wa-'unqahu aydan*. Were it not that the lexica define "*waja'a*" as "to behead," I would suspect a reference to masturbation here; as it is, I do not get the joke.

secretly, I would never have left my house!" "Strip him and give him the stipulated flogging!"¹⁰¹ "That will do you no good, for, by God, I get stipulated floggings every day!" "And who undertakes to do that?" "The penises of the Muslims!" "Throw him on his face and sit on his back!" "I suppose the amīr wants to see what I look like when I'm sodomized!" Then the governor ordered him and the boy paraded in shame through the city. When the people asked, "What is this, Dalāl?" he said, "The amīr wanted to "bring two heads together,"¹⁰² so he has brought me and this boy together and proclaimed our union; but if someone now calls him a pimp, he will be angry!" Hearing of this, the frustrated governor let them both go.

TAKHANNUTH AND PASSIVE HOMOSEXUALITY

Unlike his predecessors among the *mukhannathūn*, then, al-Dalāl is presented by at least some sources as an unabashed *maʿbūn*, that is, someone who sought the passive role in homosexual relations; as Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī has him say, in a version of the anecdote of the sugared stones at Minā attributed to al-Dalāl rather than Ṭuways, the Devil's favor for which he owes recompense is that he "made me like *ubna*."¹⁰³ Although a comprehensive investigation of this phenomenon in early Muslim society cannot be undertaken here, a few basic observations will help to put this statement in context.¹⁰⁴ Beginning with early ʿAbbāsīd times, when the literary expression of homosexual sentiment became fashionable, our sources on the topic are extraordinarily rich. In contrast, homosexuality is

rarely mentioned in our sources for Umayyad and pre-Umayyad society, and most references occur either in the *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* literature, or in vituperative poetry. Both the Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth* strongly condemn homosexual activity;¹⁰⁵ the *fiqh* literature defines this activity, more or less exclusively, as anal intercourse, and prescribes equal punishment for both the active and passive partners, distinguished when necessary as "*fāʿil*" and "*mafʿūl bihi*." It is, however, abundantly clear that in classical Islamic culture in general "active" and "passive" homosexuality were considered essentially two different, albeit complementary, phenomena. (This state of affairs is hardly surprising, given the fact that the same was, on the whole, true of Western classical civilization, and, arguably, of medieval Europe; indeed, it remains the case in much of Middle Eastern—and of Western—society today.)

The Arabic terminology alone leaves little room for doubt about the importance of this distinction. *Liwāṭ*, formed from *Lūṭ*, is the general as well as legal term for homosexual anal intercourse, and technically may refer to the "activity" of either partner; *lūṭī*, on the other hand, a term rare in the legal literature but otherwise common, always refers to the active partner, who, at least from ʿAbbāsīd times, was inevitably exposed to less intense societal disapproval than the passive partner, and, indeed, whose desires, if not his acts, were widely considered normal from at least the fourth/tenth century.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the *lūṭī*'s partner was not assumed himself necessarily to be acting from motives of sexual desire, and no single term refers simply to such a person, without reference to his motives: if he is paid, for instance, he is a *muʿājir*; if he agrees to be the passive partner in exchange for a turn as the active partner, he is a *mubādil*; if he is indeed acting out of sexual desire for the passive role, he is most commonly called a *maʿbūn*. The word *maʿbūn* carries strong connotations of pathology, and *ubna* is in fact frequently called a "disease" (*dāʾ*).¹⁰⁷ It is perhaps due to this rather clinical tone that a number of other, synonymous terms have been adopted over time, which are

¹⁰¹ *Iḍrābūhu ḥaddan*. The *ḥadd* punishment applied only to certain specific offenses. The relevant offence here is *zinā*, to which *liwāṭ* was analogized. Whether *liwāṭ* was in fact punishable with a *ḥadd* penalty was controversial; see al-Sarakhsī, *Mabsūṭ* 9:77–79; Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī, *al-Muḥadhdhab* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī, 2nd ed., 1976), 2:344.

¹⁰² That is, to make a match.

¹⁰³ Ḥamza, *Durra* 1:188; Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, *Jamhara* 1:437f.; al-Maydānī, *Majmaʿ* 1:251; al-Zamakhsharī, *Mus-taqṣā* 1:109. A more elaborate version of this anecdote, mentioning both Ṭuways and al-Dalāl and attributing to the former the comment that the Devil "made me like this desire (*shahwa*)," appears in al-Ṣafadī's biography of Ṭuways, *al-Wāfī bil-wafayāt* 16:502.

¹⁰⁴ For fuller treatment of the issues discussed in the following pages, see my essay "The Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity in Medieval Arabic Vice Lists," in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. J. Epstein and K. Straub (forthcoming).

¹⁰⁵ Qurʾān 7:80f., 26:165f., 27:54f., 29:27f., 54:37. For the *ḥadīth*, see, e.g., Mālik b. Anas, *al-Muwaṭṭaʿ*, no. 1503 (p. 593). See also *El*², s.v. "liwāṭ."

¹⁰⁶ The normal object of such "active" desires was a pubescent boy; the expression of such desires toward a full adult male was considerably more controversial, but never considered as reprehensible—or pathological—as the desire for the passive role.

¹⁰⁷ See F. Rosenthal, "Ar-Rāzī on the Hidden Illness," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 52.1 (1978): 45–60.

used more commonly in non-medical (and non-legal) contexts. In the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries, the most common of these was *baghghā*¹⁰⁸, with an abstract form *bighā*.¹⁰⁸ In the Umayyad period, the more common synonym for *ubna* seems to have been *ḥulāq*, the practitioner being a *ḥalaqī*.¹⁰⁹

What, if any, is the relationship between the *maʿbūn*, *ḥalaqī*, or *baghghā* and the *mukhannath*? For the ʿAbbāsīd and later periods, the answer is clear: *mukhannathūn* were assumed to be *baghghāʿūn*, while continuing to display many of the distinctive traits for which they were known in the Umayyad period, such as wit and flippancy, association with music in general and certain musical instruments in particular, and activity as go-betweens, as well as cross-dressing. The combination of their flippancy, effeminacy, and *bighā* earned them their own subsection in some of the later joke collections.¹¹⁰ For the pre-ʿAbbāsīd period, we have seen reason to doubt this equation. The accounts of Hīt neither state nor imply it, and in some respects seem to contradict it. Ṭuways is nowhere in the *Aghānī* associated with *ubna*. In al-Thaʿālibī's *Thimār al-qulūb*, Ṭuways is indeed called *maʿbūn*, and even said to be famous for *ubna*, as well as *takhannuth* and *shuʿm*;¹¹¹ but al-Thaʿālibī is here generalizing from a single passage in Ḥamza, in an account which nowhere else mentions *ubna*. What Ḥamza says is that Ṭuways was *maʿūf*, that is, he had an affliction (*āfa*), which he was not ashamed of and did not hide from people; he even composed the following verses about it:

I am Abū ʿAbd al-Naʿīm,
I am the Peacock of Hell (*Ṭawūs al-Jahīm*),
And I am the most ill-omened (*ashʿam*) person
To creep over the face of the earth.
I am a *ḥāʾ*, then a *lām*,
Then a *qāf* and the stuffing of a *mīm* (i.e., a
yāʾ).

¹⁰⁸ See, e.g., al-Qaḍī al-Jurjānī, *al-Muntakhab min Kitāb al-Kināyāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1984), 37–52.

¹⁰⁹ See, e.g., al-Khafājī, *Shifāʾ al-ghalīl fīmā fī kalām al-ʿarab min al-dakhīl*, ed. M. A. Khafājī (Cairo: al-Ḥaram al-Ḥusaynī, 1952), 105, and, for examples of usage, al-Jāhīz, *Madh al-nabīdh*, in *Rasāʾil*, ed. A. M. Hārūn (Cairo: al-Khānjī, 1979), 3:118; al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Imtāʿ wa-l-muʿānasa*, ed. A. Amīn and A. al-Zayn (Beirut: al-ʿAṣriyya, n.d.), 2:52.

¹¹⁰ See the successive chapters in al-ʿAbī's *Nathr al-durr*, vol. 5, ed. M. I. ʿAbd al-Rahmān (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿamma lil-Kitāb, 1987), 277–306, entitled *Nawādir al-mukhannathūn*, *Nawādir al-lāṭa*, and *Nawādir al-baghghāʿīn*.

¹¹¹ Al-Thaʿālibī, *Thimār al-qulūb*, ed. M. A. Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1985), 145f.

Certainly no more emphatic association between Ṭuways and *ḥulāq* could be imagined than these verses; they could not, even with considerable textual tampering, refer to anyone or anything else. On the other hand, their authenticity might well be questioned, since *ḥulāq* seems otherwise to play no role in Ṭuways' persona, in such notable contrast to al-Dalāl; if Ṭuways was famous as the leader, in some sense, of the *mukhannathūn* of Medina, and if all *mukhannathūn* were later assumed to be *maʿbūnīn*, then some motivation for such a fabrication might be imagined.¹¹²

Besides al-Dalāl, the other prominent figure from the Umayyad period to achieve some notoriety as a *maʿbūn* was, in fact, not one of the *mukhannathūn* musicians of Medina, but rather the city's most famous poet, al-Aḥwaṣ.¹¹³ The *Aghānī* several times refers to accusations that al-Aḥwaṣ was guilty of *ubna* or *ḥulāq*,¹¹⁴ and also offers a number of anecdotes which imply the activity without naming it. One of these concerns a beautiful boy whom al-Aḥwaṣ brought with him to one of Jamīla's public concerts,¹¹⁵ while two others claim that women associated with the poet were actually men.¹¹⁶ None of these stories, however, specify the nature of these relationships explicitly; and the need for caution in interpreting them is suggested by al-Aḥwaṣ's own reported statement that when he was aroused it did not matter to him whether he met a *nākiḥ* (active sexual partner), *mankūḥ* (passive), or *zānī* (heterosexual fornicator).¹¹⁷ Whether an anecdote

¹¹² It should perhaps be stated explicitly that we can, of course, say nothing about Ṭuways' actual sex life. What is in question here is the public image of the *mukhannathūn* and whether this included assumptions about homosexual behavior, either explicitly or implicitly.

¹¹³ On him, see Shawqī Dayf, *al-Shiʿr wa-l-ghināʾ*, 151–89; ʿĀdil Sulaymān Gamāl, ed., *Shiʿr al-Aḥwaṣ al-Anṣārī* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1970), 1–55; K. Petrāček, "Das Leben des Dichters al-Aḥwaṣ al-Anṣārī," *Orientalia Pragensia* 7 (1970): 23–57.

¹¹⁴ *Aghānī* 1:113 and 7:39 (the two accounts are identical, except for the use of *ḥulāq* in the first and *ubna* in the second); 1:139 and 14:167; 4:43.

¹¹⁵ *Aghānī* 7:139.

¹¹⁶ *Aghānī* 18:196–98, in two versions, and 198f.

¹¹⁷ *Aghānī* 4:43. If the text is sound, *nākiḥ* must here have, unusually, the meaning *lūṭī*; it would be tempting to emend *zānī* to *zāniya*. Petrāček, "Leben," 35, takes all three terms as referring to women, and translates "verlobte, verheiratete oder ehebrecherische," but while the lexica support the meaning "married woman" for *nākiḥ*, I have found no lexical justification for his feminine interpretation of the other two terms.

portraying him as entering a mosque wearing two polished, saffron-dyed garments, bedaubed with saffron perfume and with a bundle of basil behind his ear is intended to imply *takhannuth* is quite unclear, although he is called a *mukhannath* explicitly once in the *Aghānī*—by the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik on the occasion of his pilgrimage (in 75/695), when he sermonized the Medinans and reproached them for their frivolity, illustrating his point with verses by al-Aḥwaṣ, whom he calls “your *mukhannath* and brother.”¹¹⁸

One anecdote, however, does testify quite explicitly to al-Aḥwaṣ’s *ubna*. During a stay with the caliph al-Walīd, he is said to have attempted to seduce the baker boys in the retinue of a fellow guest into having (active) intercourse with him (*yafʿalū bihi*); about to be exposed for this, he compounded his problem by attempting a diversionary tactic, inciting a disgruntled client of the guest to accuse the latter himself of sexual harassment. The truth came out, however, and the caliph sent al-Aḥwaṣ to Ibn Ḥazm, his *qādī* in Medina, with orders to give him a hundred lashes, pour oil on his head, and parade him in shame before the people.¹¹⁹ Either at this time or somewhat later, Ibn Ḥazm, an inveterate enemy of al-Aḥwaṣ, went a step further and banished him to the Red Sea island of Dahlak, where the poet remained for something over five years, until pardoned by the caliph Yazīd II. The reason usually given for this banishment is not, however, al-Aḥwaṣ’s *ubna*, but his unwillingness to give up his practice of mentioning aristocratic ladies by name in his amatory verses.¹²⁰ Such behavior, in its challenge to society’s mores and the dignity of its members, was seen as symptomatic of a general profligacy which could then be readily fleshed out by accusations of sexual irregularity—*zinā* and *liwāt*, as well as *ubna*—whatever the truth of the latter. The suggestion of *takhannuth* belongs to another, but related range of objectionable activities, representing luxury, self-indulgence, and frivolity, and including the adoption of ostentatious dress and perfumes, wine-drinking, and music.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ *Aghānī* 4:51.

¹¹⁹ *Aghānī* 4:43f. On the *bulus*, sacks on which offenders were set as a form of public humiliation, see Lane, s.v.

¹²⁰ *Aghānī* 4:43, 48, and 8:54. For further references and discussion, see Gamāl, *Shiʿr al-Aḥwaṣ*, 35ff., and Petráček, “Leben,” 41–49; on the Hijazi *tashbīb*, see Vadet, *L’Esprii courtois*, 102–12.

¹²¹ Summed up by the word *lahw*. Besides his close association with Jamīla, al-Aḥwaṣ was closely tied with musical circles because of Maʿbad and Mālik’s musical settings of his *ghazal*, which contributed considerably to his celebrity.

GOVERNMENT PERSECUTION OF THE *MUKHANNATHŪN*

That there were sporadic attempts by the government to suppress these trends has been noted above. Sanctions against *mukhannathūn* in the time of the Prophet and the early caliphs seem to have been intended to safeguard the privacy of the realm of women—infringed upon in a different way by the *tashbīb* of al-Aḥwaṣ. Under the early Umayyads, the execution of Ibn Nughāsh and the bounty put on the heads of other *mukhannathūn* was, according to the extant reports, based on a perceived connection between cross-dressing and a lack of proper religious commitment. This persecution is attributed both to Muʿāwīya’s governor Marwān b. al-Ḥakam and to the latter’s brother Yaḥyā, later governor under ʿAbd al-Malik. While the latter attribution may be chronologically more plausible, the former is supported by other evidence for Marwān’s severity. The account of his drastic measures to stop Yaḥyā’s daughter’s too-public behavior, with al-Dalāl’s consequent flight to Mecca, has been noted above; elsewhere, the *Aghānī* claims that Muʿāwīya appointed Marwān and Saʿīd b. al-ʿĀṣ as governor of Medina for alternate years, and contrasts the harshness of Marwān, under whom the (sexually) profligate¹²² would flee the city, with the mildness of Saʿīd, under whom they would come back.¹²³

This last statement is made in the context of an account of the *mukhannath* Find, a participant in Jamīla’s concert and a close friend of the poet Ibn Qays al-Ruqayyāt, many of whose verses he set to music.¹²⁴ Like al-Dalāl, Find acted as a go-between—specifically, he provided a space in his house for lovers’ trysts—and Ibn Qays composed some verses in appreciation of this service. According to the story in the *Aghānī*, Marwān, during one of his years out of office, was on his way to the mosque when he encountered Find; striking him with his staff, he quoted these verses by Ibn Qays, accused him of promoting immorality, and threatened him. Find turned and coolly replied, “Yes, you’re right about me! But, praise God, what an ugly ex-governor you are!” Marwān laughed, but added, “Enjoy while you can! It won’t be long before you see what I have in store for you!” (We hear nothing,

¹²² *Ahl al-dīʿāra wa-l-fusūq*.

¹²³ *Aghānī* 16:59f.; cf. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *Iqd* 6:34f.

¹²⁴ On him, see the references in F. Rosenthal, *Humor in Early Islam* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1956), 8, n. 7. His name appears in the sources as both Find and Qand; Abū l-Faraj, *Aghānī* 16:59, expresses a preference for Find.

however, of a sequel to this story.) Here once again it is the promotion of *heterosexual* immorality which occasions government intervention. About Find's own sexual proclivities we are told nothing.¹²⁵ What we do hear about is, as with other *mukhannathūn*, his charm and his ability to make people laugh. It is striking that he, as well as at least five other Medinan *mukhannathūn*, are included in a list in the *Fihrist* of nineteen buffoons (*baṭṭālūn*) about whom monographs had been written;¹²⁶ the most famous comics of this period, however, were not *mukhannathūn*.¹²⁷

No mention is made of Find in our accounts of the bounty put on the *mukhannathūn*, whether by Marwān or by his brother Yaḥyā, and there seems to be no other evidence for persecution by the latter of either *mukhannathūn* or musicians. That Ṭuways went into permanent exile under either seems unlikely, particularly in view of the account referred to above of his reception of Yaḥyā's successor, the more indulgent Abān b. ʿUthmān.¹²⁸ Concerning the attitude of Abān's successor, Hishām b. Ismāʿīl al-Makhzūmī (83–87/702–6), I have found no information. Hishām was ʿAbd al-Malik's last governor of Medina, and was replaced only when al-Walīd came to the throne, by ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (87–93/706–12), who is described as being at this time rather a *bon vivant* and devotee of

poetry and even music (in contrast to his later ascetic piety as caliph). These years seem to represent the heyday of poetry and music in the Hijaz, and the first hint of trouble comes only under ʿUmar's successor, ʿUthmān b. Ḥayyān (93–96/712–15). When the latter arrived in Medina, we are told, some prominent citizens urged him to put an end to the rampant "corruption" by purifying the city of "singing and fornication"; he responded by giving the people involved in these activities three days to leave town. At the eleventh hour, the eminently respectable—but music-loving—Ibn Abī ʿAtīq, who had been away, returned and heard the news from Sallāma al-Zarqāʾ, one of the city's best-loved singers. Going immediately to the governor, he convinced him to admit Sallāma, who impressed him first with her piety, then her skill at Qurʾānic recitation, and finally was permitted to sing, at which ʿUthmān was so delighted that he dropped his banishment order.¹²⁹

ʿUthmān's original order was directed against singing and fornication, and nothing is said about the *mukhannathūn*. In contrast, probably about the same time, al-Walīd's governor of Mecca, Nāfiʿ b. Alqama al-Kinānī, "took stringent measures against singing, singers, and date-wine, and issued a proclamation against the *mukhannathūn*."¹³⁰ Only two of the latter, Ibn Surayj and his pupil al-Gharīd, are mentioned by name; Ibn Surayj seems to have played a game of cat and mouse with the governor, and escaped serious reprisals (he apparently died soon thereafter), while al-Gharīd is said to have fled to Yemen, where he spent the rest of his life. Although we have no indication of a wider *mukhannathūn* "community" in Mecca, the relevant anecdotes about both these musicians conform to the image of the *mukhannath* we have seen in Medina. Ibn Surayj is described as wearing dyed clothing and playing with a locust which he had on a string; when someone chided him for this, he retorted, "What harm does it to do people if I color my garments and play with my locust?" To the rejoinder that his "immoral

¹²⁵ The entry on him in the rather mangled *Mukhtār kitāb al-lahw wa-l-malāḥī* of Ibn Khurradādhbih edited by Khalīfē (p. 150) may refer to these, but is unclear in its present textual state.

¹²⁶ Al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifā, n.d.), 435. Also included are Nawmat al-Ḍuḥā and Hibatallāh, known from Jamīla's concert; Ibn al-Shūnīzī (?), who has an entry, in the form "Ṭarīfa b. al-Shūtārī," in Ibn Khurradādhbih's *Mukhtār* (149f.), between the entries for al-Dalāl and Find; and Abū l-Ḥurr al-Madīnī, referred to as a Medinan *mukhannath* and marriage broker by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *ʿIqd* 6:105, and presumably identical to the "Abū l-Khazz" mentioned in both Ibn Khurradādhbih's *Mukhtār* (p. 144) and al-ʿAbī's chapter of *mukhannathūn* jokes (*Nathr al-durr* 5:282). Of the other *mukhannathūn* included in Ibn Khurradādhbih's *Mukhtār* (pp. 149–51, 159), Ṣāliḥ b. Zuhayr has been mentioned above (n. 68); the rest—Sajjiyya, Shabīb, Ṣaʿtar, and the Meccan Madār—do not appear in other sources I have consulted.

¹²⁷ The most famous of all was Ashʿab, the accounts of whom constitute the core of Rosenthal's *Humor in Early Islam*.

¹²⁸ For the common depiction of Abān as rather simple, see Rosenthal, *Humor*, 21, 53, 95.

¹²⁹ See note 56 above.

¹³⁰ *Aghānī* 2:142, 11:19–22. Confusion reigns with regard to the dates of Nāfiʿ's tenure as governor. The *Aghānī* account calls him al-Walīd's governor and has him communicating with al-Ḥajjāj (d. 95/714); al-Jāḥiẓ, *Bayān* 1:302, 393, makes him governor of both Mecca and Medina (certainly erroneously) under ʿAbd al-Malik (d. 86/705); E. von Zambaur, *Manuel de généalogie et de chronologie pour l'histoire de l'Islam* (Hanover: Heinz Lafaire, 1927), 19, lists him as governor of Mecca under Sulaymān in 96/715.

songs” led people into temptation, he replied with a song which left his antagonist speechless with delight.¹³¹ Al-Gharīd is depicted conveying verses between Meccan poets and aristocrats, a kind of “go-between” activity not directed toward marriage, but probably only possible because of his *mukhannath* status.¹³² Al-Gharīd’s erotic interests were apparently, like al-Dalāl’s, in males (although whether he was a *halaqī*—as seems probable—or a *lūfī* is unspecified), at least according to one anecdote in the *Aghānī*. Invited to join a group on an outing, he was attracted to a young man (*ghulām*) and asked the group to speak to him about meeting with him privately; when the young man agreed, the two withdrew behind a rock. When al-Gharīd had “fulfilled his need,” the young man rejoined the group, and al-Gharīd began to pelt the rock with pebbles, explaining that, as on the Day of Judgment the rock would testify against them, he was trying to “wound” this testimony (*ajrahu shahādahā*).¹³³

Al-Gharīd and al-Dalāl are the only two *mukhannathūn* from the pre-ʿAbbāsīd period for whom we have explicit anecdotal evidence of homosexual activity. The *Aghānī* offers one further anecdote which would seem to make this linkage, but whose implications are unclear.¹³⁴ A *mukhannath* from Mecca named Mukhkha is said to have come to al-Dalāl in Medina and asked him to introduce him to (*dullinī ʿalā*) one of the *mukhannathūn* of Medina, whom he could beguile, tease, and then seduce (*ukāyiduhu wa-umāzīhuhu thumma ujādhībuhu*).¹³⁵ Al-Dalāl replied, “I have just the person for you!” and described a neighbor of his,

whom he would find at that moment in the mosque, performing his prayers, “for show.”¹³⁶ In fact, however, this man was the police chief of Medina, Khaytham b. ʿIrāk b. Mālik.¹³⁷ Finding Khaytham in the midst of his prayers, Mukhkha told him to hurry up and finish, addressing him in the feminine.¹³⁸ Taken aback, Khaytham exclaimed, “Glory to God (*subḥān Allāh*)!” Mukhkha retorted, “May you sleep (*sabaḥṭa*) in a pinching shackle (?)!”¹³⁹ Finish up, so I can talk with you for a while!” But when Khaytham finished his prayer, he ordered the *mukhannath* seized, given a hundred stripes, and imprisoned. Sexual activity between *mukhannathūn* seems to be clearly implied by this anecdote, a situation I have not encountered anywhere else in the literature, either pre-ʿAbbāsīd or ʿAbbāsīd; one could perhaps imagine here a sort of reverse *bidāl*, that is, taking turns for the sake of enjoying the passive (rather than active) role, but the historicity of the anecdote is so problematical that it is perhaps best discounted altogether.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ “*Li-yurāʿiya l-nās*,” clearly a reference to the assumed irreligiosity of the *mukhannathūn*.

¹³⁷ Khaytham was *ṣāhib al-shurṭa*, we are told, under Ziyād b. ʿAbdallāh al-Ḥārithī; the latter was governor of Medina from 133/750 to 141/758, according to al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 7:459, 511.

¹³⁸ “*ʿAjjilī bi-ṣalātiki lā ṣallā Allāh ʿalayki*.” I have seen no other examples of this use of the feminine among the *mukhannathūn* in the pre-ʿAbbāsīd period, although later it became not uncommon.

¹³⁹ “*Sabaḥṭa fī jāmiʿa qarrāṣa*.” Clearly some sarcastic pun is intended here, but the meaning is obscure. In the parallel version of the anecdote in the *Muwaffaqiyyāt* of al-Zubayr b. Bakkār (see next note), the phrase is “*Sabaḥṭa bi-umm al-zinā fī jāmiʿa qamila*,” which is followed by an intrusive gloss, explaining that “*jāmiʿa*” means “shackle” (*qayd*), and “*qamī*” means “being imprisoned so long that one’s shackle (reading *qayd* for *qadd*) becomes lousy.” According to Lane, s.v. *ghull*, the latter term, a synonym for *jāmiʿa*, was used metonymically for “wife” (that is, “ball and chain”), while *ghull qamī* referred to “a woman of evil disposition.” *Sabaḥṭa* may mean “swim,” “gallop,” “burrow,” and other things, as well as “sleep.”

¹⁴⁰ Al-Zubayr b. Bakkār, *al-Akhhār al-Muwaffaqiyyāt*, ed. S. M. al-ʿĀnī (Baghdād: Maṭbaʿat al-ʿĀnī, 1972), 32f., has a garbled version of this anecdote in which the Medinan joker is not al-Dalāl but Muzabbid, a well-known Medinan comic similar to Ashʿab and nowhere else associated with *takhan-nuth* (see Rosenthal, *Humor*, 14). The placement of the story under an ʿAbbāsīd governor is too late for either al-Dalāl or Muzabbid.

¹³¹ *Aghānī* 1:97f.

¹³² *Aghānī* 3:101f.; cf. 2:133.

¹³³ *Aghānī* 2:128f. “*Jaraḥa*” means both “to wound” and “to impugn the probity of a witness.”

¹³⁴ *Aghānī* 4:64.

¹³⁵ *Kayd al-nisāʾ*, “the guile of women,” is a standard cliché, based in part on the statement of Qurʾān 12:28, in the context of the story of Potiphar’s wife, “*inna kaydakunna ʿazīm*”; see al-Thaʿālibī, *Thimār al-qulūb*, 305 (*kayd al-nisāʾ*). The third form of this root, *kāyada*, with verbal noun *kiyād*, seems equally stereotypical for *mukhannathūn*, as indicated by Ḥamza, *Durra*, 61, where “*kiyād mukhannath*” is included in a list of clichés created by settled Arabic speakers on the model of the Bedouins’ animal clichés. Similarly, the ʿAbbāsīd poet Abū l-ʿAtāhiya, reproached in his youth for *takhan-nuth*, and in particular for taking up the *zāmila* (a kind of *ṭabl* or drum) of the *mukhannathūn*, justified himself by saying “I want to learn their *kiyād* and memorize their speech”; see *Aghānī* 3:122–24.

CULMINATION OF THE PERSECUTION

Of considerably greater interest is another anecdote concerning al-Dalāl, and indeed all the *mukhannathūn* of his generation, which describes a particularly severe persecution to which they were subjected and seems to explain the rather abrupt end to their prominence and influence in Medina. Unfortunately, as with so many of the stories recounted above, this most widely reported of all the *mukhannathūn* anecdotes appears in a great variety of versions, which differ not only on the nature and scope of the persecution, but also on its occasion and rationale; at the same time, however, the different accounts provide numerous details which help further to fill out our picture of the *mukhannathūn* at this time.

In the *Aghānī*, Abū l-Faraj juxtaposes a number of these accounts, but specifies two very similar versions among them as being the most reliable. According to the first, the caliph Sulaymān was in camp in the desert one night, enjoying the company of a slave girl. He ordered her to assist him in his ablutions, but she failed to notice when he gestured to her to pour the water. Looking up, he saw that she was listening intently to a man's singing drifting in from the camp. He noted the voice, and the verses, and the next day brought up the subject of song with his companions, feigning a genuine interest in it. Their comments quickly led him to the identity of the previous night's singer, one Samīr al-Aylī, whom he summoned and interrogated. He then pronounced that "[t]he he-camel brays, and the she-camel comes running; the male goat cries, and the female goat submits herself (?),¹⁴¹ the male pigeon coos, and the female struts; a man sings, and a woman swoons (*ṭaribat*)," and had the singer castrated. When he then asked him where this business of singing originated, he replied, "In Medina, among the *mukhannathūn*; they are the best and most highly skilled at it." The caliph then sent an order to his governor in

Medina, Ibn Ḥazm al-Anṣārī, to castrate (*akḥṣi*) all the *mukhannathūn* singers there, which he did.¹⁴²

In this version, the *mukhannathūn* were punished simply because they were musicians. The grotesque choice of punishment, meted out equally to the non-*mukhannath* Samīr,¹⁴³ is a response, if not an entirely clear one, to the nature of the offense: music rouses women's passions and is thus a moral threat to society. The implication that the caliph was acting out of personal jealousy over his own slave girl is made explicit in Abū l-Faraj's other preferred version, which gives the verses of Samīr's song as follows:

Secluded, she heard my voice, and it kept her
awake
Through the long night to a wearisome dawn,
Her neck veiled by two swathes of saffron,
With green ornaments on her breast,
On a night of full moon, her bed companion
unable to say
Whether her face or the moon shed more light.
Were she free, she would come to me on feet
So delicate they would almost shatter from
her tread.

Needless to say, the description in the verses matched the slave girl; Sulaymān, furious with jealousy, imprisoned the singer and threatened the girl with her life. She protested that she had spent her entire life in the Hijaz until being purchased by Sulaymān, and would have had no opportunity to become acquainted with anyone locally (apparently somewhere in Syria). Samīr when summoned also protested his innocence, and Sulaymān was finally convinced. He was unwilling to let Samīr go free, however (*lam taṭīb nafsuhu bi-takhliyatihī sawiyyan*), so he had him castrated and ordered the same for the *mukhannathūn*.¹⁴⁴

Other versions also stress Sulaymān's jealousy, and some have nothing to say about the *mukhannathūn* at all. Such is the case in the *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, which gives one version which ends with the singer's castration, and another in which even he gets off with a warning.¹⁴⁵ Other sources omit the story of the singer, and have

¹⁴¹ *Shakarāt*, apparently related to *shakr*, "female pudenda"; see Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān* 4:2307. The reading is confirmed by a parallel in Ghars al-Niʿma, *al-Hafawāt al-nādira* (Damascus, 1967), 89–91. Other versions substitute forms of the verb *istahramat*, "to desire the male": Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *ʿIqd* 6:66–69; ps. -Jāḥiẓ, *al-Maḥāsin wa-l-aḍḍād*, ed. G. Van Vloten (Leiden: Brill, 1898), 292–94; Ḥamza, *Durra*, 186–88; Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, *Jamhara* 1:437f.; al-Thaʿālibī, *Thimār*, 676; al-Maydānī, *Majmaʿ* 1:258f. This phrase is lacking altogether in the abbreviated version in al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil* 1:393, and Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *ʿIqd* 6:24.

¹⁴² *Aghānī* 4:60f.

¹⁴³ In no version of the story is he ever identified as a *mukhannath*.

¹⁴⁴ *Aghānī* 4:61f.

¹⁴⁵ Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *ʿIqd* 6:24, 50, 66–69. Cf., respectively, al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil* 1:393, and al-Zubayr b. Bakkār, *al-Akḥbār al-Muwaffaqiyyā*, 191f.

only the castration of the *mukhannathūn*. According to one version in Ḥamza al-Ḥṣḥānī, this was done because “they had become many in Medina, and were ruining the women for the men (*afṣadū l-nisāʾ ʿalā l-rijāl*);”¹⁴⁶ similarly, another version in the *Aghānī*, which names the caliph as al-Walīd, says that he took action when informed that the women of Quraysh were visited by the *mukhannathūn* in Medina, despite the Prophet’s explicit prohibition.¹⁴⁷ The *Aghānī* also records a particularly lurid version, on the authority of Muṣʿab al-Zubayrī, who claimed to know best why al-Dalāl—specifically—was castrated. After arranging a marriage, according to Muṣʿab, al-Dalāl would convince the bride that her sexual excitement at the prospect of the wedding night was excessive and would only disgust her husband, and then he would offer to calm her down by having sexual intercourse with her first. He would then go to the groom, make the same point, and offer himself, passively, to cool him down as well. The outraged Sulaymān, here again called “jealous,” *gharūr*, but in a general sense, wrote to have *all* the *mukhannathūn* castrated, saying, “They are admitted to the women of Quraysh and corrupt them.”¹⁴⁸ Here, even with explicit testimony to al-Dalāl’s homosexual behavior, it is the morals of the women which are of concern.

There is considerable variation among versions even with regard to the identity of the caliph and the governor, the former appearing sometimes as al-Walīd, ʿUmar II, or Hishām, and the latter as ʿUthmān b. Ḥayyān,¹⁴⁹ although Sulaymān and Ibn Ḥazm are by far the most frequently named. The singer and the slavegirl are also variously named.¹⁵⁰ One fairly common addition to the story, which serves as the basis for its inclusion in several of our *adab* sources, absolves Sulaymān of responsibility for the castration by claim-

ing that what he actually wrote to the governor was “make a register (*aḥṣī*) of the *mukhannathūn*”; but the spluttering pen of the amanuensis added a dot to the *ḥāʾ* so that it read “*ikhṣī*,” “castrate.” Some of these sources let the governor off the hook as well, reporting that he questioned the reading but was assured that the dot “looked like a date,” or “was as big as the star Canopus.” These stories perhaps imply that Sulaymān’s action was viewed by some as unexpectedly brutal.¹⁵¹

Several sources name some or all of the victims (besides al-Dalāl, who is almost always included). A number of these also report a series of quips said to have been pronounced by them on the occasion. The fullest version of these statements is offered by Ḥamza, whose list is as follows:

Ṭuways: “This is simply a circumcision which we must undergo again.”

al-Dalāl: “Or rather the Greater Circumcision!”

Nasīm al-Saḥar (“Breeze of the Dawn”): “With castration I have become a *mukhannath* in truth!”

Nawmat al-Duḥā: “Or rather we have become women in truth!”

Bard al-Fuʿād: “We have been spared the trouble of carrying around a spout for urine.”

Zill al-Shajar (“Shade Under the Trees”): “What would we do with an unused weapon, anyway?”¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ The most extensive discussion of this “*taṣḥīf*” version is in al-Jāhīz, *Ḥayawān* 1:121f. It also appears, in one form or another, in al-Jahshiyārī, *K. al-Wuzarāʾ wa-l-kuttāb*, 54; al-Ṣūlī, *Adab al-kuttāb* (Cairo: al-Salafiyya, 1341), 59; Ḥamza, *Durra*, 186–88; *Aghānī* 4:61; Abū Aḥmad al-ʿAskarī, *Sharḥ mā yaqaʿu fīhi l-taṣḥīf wal-taḥrīf* 1:54–56; al-Ḥuṣrī, *Jamʿ al-jawāhir*, 51; al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī, *Muntakhab*, 27; al-Maydānī, *Majmaʿ* 1:251, 258f.; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Akhhbār al-nisāʾ*, 83–88.

¹⁵² Ḥamza, *Durra*, 186–88, reproduced by Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, *Jamhara* 1:437f., and al-Maydānī, *Majmaʿ* 1:251. Ibn Khurraḍādhbih, *Mukhtār*, 149, attributes the first two of these sayings to, respectively, Ṭarīfa (or Ṭarīqa) b. al-Shūtārī (on whom see note 126 above) and al-Dalāl, and names as other victims Bard al-Fuʿād and Nawmat al-Duḥā. Since, according to Ibn Khallikān, Ṭuways had died three years before this event (see note 46 above), it seems likely that in Ḥamza’s account his name has replaced that of the less well-known Ṭarīfa/Ṭarīqa; this supposition is supported by the version in the *Aghānī* 4:61, which claims that altogether nine *mukhannathūn* were castrated, including al-Dalāl, Ṭarīf, and

¹⁴⁶ Ḥamza, *Durra*, 186, repeated in al-Maydānī, *Majmaʿ* 1:258.

¹⁴⁷ *Aghānī* 4:62.

¹⁴⁸ *Aghānī* 4:59f.

¹⁴⁹ See, e.g., al-Jāhīz, *Ḥayawān* 1:121f.; *Aghānī* 4:62; al-Jahshiyārī, *K. al-Wuzarāʾ wa-l-kuttāb*, ed. M. al-Saqqa et al. (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 2nd ed., 1980), 54.

¹⁵⁰ Samīr also appears as Sinān; “al-Aylī” is sometimes “al-Ubullī”; the slavegirl is called al-Dhālfaʾ or ʿAwān. See Ibn Khurraḍādhbih, *Mukhtār*, 149; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *Iqd* 6:66–69; ps.-Jāhīz, *al-Maḥāsin wa-l-aḍḍād*, 292–94; *Aghānī* 4:60; Ghars al-Niʿma, *Hafawāt*, 89–91; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Akhhbār al-nisāʾ* (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayān, n.d.), 83–88.

The last two statements imply that what the *mukhannathūn* underwent was *jibāb*, the more drastic form of castration in which the penis was truncated.¹⁵³ They serve to stress the *mukhannathūn*'s lack of sexual interest in women, while the two preceding statements identify the essential psychological motivation behind *takhannuth* as gender identification with women. The flippancy of tone in these quips is of course characteristic of the *mukhannath* persona, and also points to the singular inappropriateness of the punishment, despite its savagery; significantly, there is no positive reference to sexual orientation, as opposed to gender identity.

Our sources offer few details about the aftermath of this traumatic event. One much-repeated anecdote has Ibn Abī ʿAtīq reacting to news of the castration of al-Dalāl by insisting that (whatever one might say against him) he had done a fine rendition of some verses by al-Aḥwaṣ.¹⁵⁴ According to another story, both Badrāqus, the physician who performed the castration, and his assistant were part of a group who set out from Mecca at some later date and were offered hospitality en route by Ḥabīb Nawmat al-Duḥā. When the assistant asked Ḥabīb his identity, he replied, "Do you not recognize me after having 'circumcized' me?" Taken aback, the assistant avoided the food offered by Ḥabīb for fear of poisoning.¹⁵⁵ A third account, dependent on the "*taṣḥīf*" version of the castration story, reports that the caliph Sulaymān was grieved by the accidental castration of the charming al-Dalāl, and had him secretly brought to his court. When the caliph asked him how he was, al-Dalāl replied, "Now that you've truncated (*jababta*) me in front, do you want to truncate me in back?" Sulaymān laughed, and ordered him to sing. Unable to decide whether he was more charmed by his wit or his singing, the caliph kept him

with him a month, rewarded him richly, and sent him back to the Hijaz.¹⁵⁶

What is more striking than these few stories is the general silence in our sources on the Medinese *mukhannathūn* after this event, in sharp contrast to the wealth of anecdotes for the few decades before it. Whatever the historicity of the details of the account of their castration, this silence supports the assumption that they did suffer a major blow sometime around the caliphate of Sulaymān.¹⁵⁷ The individual victims presumably lived out their lives, and it is not improbable that al-Dalāl, for example, may have continued to sing, to act as a go-between, and to pursue boys, as in the one anecdote we have about him which is datable after this time.¹⁵⁸ But none of the next generation of singers, which included such major figures as Mālik b. Abī l-Samḥ, Ibn ʿĀḍisha, Ibn Muḥriz, Yūnus al-Kātib, ʿUmar al-Wādī, and Ḥakam al-Wādī, are ever referred to as *mukhannathūn*. An anecdote about Ḥakam al-Wādī suggests that, while the connection between the *mukhannathūn* and music was not entirely broken, they had suffered a severe loss of prestige. Like several other Hijazi musicians, Ḥakam emigrated to Iraq, where he enjoyed the patronage of the dissolute Muḥammad b. Abī l-ʿAbbās, nephew of the ʿAbbāsīd caliph al-Manṣūr (136–58/754–75). Muḥammad was particularly appreciative of Ḥakam's songs in *hazaj*, a style he had only begun to cultivate late in his life. Ḥakam's son, however, disapproved of this, and reproached his father, saying, "In your old age, will you take to singing in the style of the *mukhannathūn*?" But his father replied, "Be quiet, ignorant boy! I sang in the heavy (*thaqīl*) style for sixty years, and never made more than my daily bread; but in the last few years I have sung songs in *hazaj* and made more money than you'd ever seen before!"¹⁵⁹

Another Hijazi singer who made his way to ʿAbbāsīd Iraq in his old age was Mālik b. Abī l-Samḥ, who was patronized briefly by Sulaymān b. ʿAlī, uncle of the caliph al-Saffāḥ (132–36/749–54) and the latter's

Ḥabīb Nawmat al-Duḥā. According to the *Aghānī*, one of the victims simply enunciated the benediction, appropriate to a circumcision, "*salima l-khātīn wa-l-makhtūn*." See also Abū Aḥmad al-ʿAskarī, *Taṣḥīf* 1:54–56; al-Ṣūlī, *Adab al-kuttāb*, 59; al-Jurjānī, *Mukhtār*, 27, and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Akhbār al-nisāʾ*, 83–88.

¹⁵³ See A. Cheikh Moussa, "Çaḥiḥ et les eunuques ou la confusion du même et de l'autre," *Arabica* 29 (1982): 184–214, esp. 192f.

¹⁵⁴ See note 79 above. In most versions, Ibn Abī ʿAtīq makes his comment in the midst of his prayers in the mosque, and the intention is clearly to show how he combined piety with appreciation for music.

¹⁵⁵ *Aghānī* 4:61. A year or two after the operation, the narrator adds, Ḥabīb's beard began to fall out.

¹⁵⁶ *Aghānī* 4:66.

¹⁵⁷ Sulaymān's punishment of al-Aḥwaṣ would seem to represent a similar move on the caliph's part, although I have not seen the two measures mentioned together in any of the sources.

¹⁵⁸ At the time of Hishām's pilgrimage, in 106/725; see p. 684 above. The improbability of the Mukhkha anecdote, which has al-Dalāl still alive in ʿAbbāsīd times, has been pointed out above, note 140.

¹⁵⁹ *Aghānī* 6:64.

governor of lower Iraq, before returning to Medina. While staying in Basra, we are told, Mālik met ʿAjjāja, the most famous of the *mukhannathūn* there. ʿAjjāja insisted in singing for Mālik a song he had learned from another *mukhannath*, accompanying himself with the *duff*. The song turned out to be Mālik's own, and Mālik did not know whether to be appalled or amused, but kept repeating, "Who sang this to you? Who passed it on to you from me?"¹⁶⁰ This story should not be interpreted to suggest that *mukhannath* musicians represented a phenomenon in late Umayyad and early ʿAbbāsid Iraq comparable to that earlier in Medina. ʿAjjāja may have been the most famous *mukhannath* in Basra, but to my knowledge he is mentioned nowhere in our sources except in this single anecdote. As with the later Hijazi musicians, none of the indigenous Iraqi musicians known to us, beginning with Ḥunayn al-Ḥirī, are referred to as *mukhannathūn*. In fact, the only significant figure in Iraq in this period whom I have found linked to *takhannuth* is the late Umayyad governor Khālīd al-Qaṣrī (105–20/723–38). According to a number of malicious, and highly improbable, reports in the *Aghānī*, this man, who spent his youth in Medina, is identified with a certain Khālīd al-Khirrīt, a *mukhannath* who associated with the Medinese *mukhannathūn* and musicians and used to convey messages between the poet ʿUmar b. Abī Rabīʿa and various aristocratic ladies in the city.¹⁶¹ Yet even were we to grant these reports some credence, no trace of such frivolity is to be found in al-Qaṣrī's stern governorship of Iraq, where, we are told, he issued a decree forbidding singing.¹⁶²

Reports about *mukhannathūn* begin to appear again with any frequency in our sources only in the high ʿAbbāsid period, and then primarily in Baghdad. But by then their situation had changed rather radically. While we do hear occasionally of *mukhannath* musicians at court, none achieved sufficient celebrity even to have their names preserved. They continued to play the *duff*, but became associated also with a particular kind of drum and with the *ṭunbūr*, a long-necked

lute.¹⁶³ More than their music, however, it was their wit that now defined their persona, as illustrated most clearly by the career of ʿAbbāda, the son of a cook at the court of al-Maʾmūn (198–218/813–33), who served as a kind of court jester, with some interruptions, for over forty years. In no way a musician, ʿAbbāda was also less a wit than a buffoon, whose stock in trade was savage mockery, extravagant burlesque, and low sexual humor, much of the latter turning on his flaunting of his passive homosexuality.¹⁶⁴ All these characteristics were henceforth to be associated with the figure of the *mukhannath*, and offer a considerable contrast with the earlier situation in the Hijaz.

An analysis of the nature of this change, and its relation to differing social conditions in Iraq, or processes of social change there, must be reserved for a future study of the *mukhannathūn* in the ʿAbbāsid period. Certainly a crucial factor was the sudden emergence of (active) homoerotic sentiment as an acceptable, and indeed fashionable, subject for prestige literature, as represented most notably by the poetry of Abū Nuwās. Increased public awareness of homosexuality, which was to persist through the following centuries, seems to have altered perceptions of gender in such a way that "effeminacy," while continuing to be distinguished from (passive) homosexual activity or desire, was no longer seen as independent from it; and the stigma attached to the latter seems correspondingly to have been directed at the former as well, so that the *mukhannathūn* were never again to enjoy the status attained by their predecessors in Umayyad Medina.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ See note 82 above. E. Neubauer, *Musiker am Hof der Frühen Abbāsiden*, 38, notes the connection between the fast *hazaj* rhythm and the *ṭunbūr*, which had little resonance.

¹⁶⁴ For examples of ʿAbbāda's humor, see the sections on *mukhannathūn* and on *baghghāʾūn* in al-Ābī, *Nathr al-durr* 5:277–92, 302–6.

¹⁶⁵ The evidence for *mukhannathūn*, not only in the ʿAbbāsid period, but also in subsequent periods up to the present day remains to be investigated. A well-known nineteenth-century reference is E. W. Lane's description in *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London: John Murray, 1860 [Dover reprint, New York, 1973]), 381f., of the transvestite dancers of Cairo called *khawals* and *ginks*. The only significant study of contemporary *mukhannathūn* in the Middle East is Unni Wikan's controversial article on the *khanīth* of Oman, "Man Becomes Woman: Transsexualism in Oman As a Key to Gender Roles," *Man* 12 (1977): 304–19.

¹⁶⁰ *Aghānī* 4:169f.

¹⁶¹ *Aghānī* 19:55f.

¹⁶² *Aghānī* 1:160. Al-Qaṣrī was also governor of Mecca for a time, under either ʿAbd al-Malik or al-Walīd; see *EI*², s.v. "Khālīd b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Qaṣrī." I have found no reports on his relations with musicians or *mukhannathūn* during his tenure there.



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Medieval Arab Lesbians and Lesbian-Like Women

SAHAR AMER

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

IF THE ABSENCE OF A SPECIFIC terminology to denote lesbianism in medieval Europe seems to have compromised the production of scholarship about same-sex love and desire among women, the existence of the label *sahq* and *sihaqa*, *musahaqat al-nisa'*, or *sahiq* (Arabic words for "lesbianism" and "lesbian," respectively) in medieval Arabic writings did not result in a richer critical production. In fact, if relatively little research has been conducted on female same-sex desire in medieval Europe, even less has been produced on homosexuality in the medieval Arabic literary or Islamicate tradition, and almost no research at all has been done on medieval Arab Islamicate lesbianism.¹ This state of scholarship into alternative sexual practices in the Arab Islamicate world is especially astonishing considering the survival of a noteworthy body of primary texts dealing precisely with this topic. Furthermore, if one broadens the category of medieval Arab lesbian to include women who were "lesbian-like," as Judith Bennett has invited us to do in our construction of the history of Western female homosexuality, we uncover additional expressions of medieval Arab lesbian

I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* who made countless helpful suggestions.

¹ There have been to my knowledge only two colloquia directly addressing the topic of medieval homosexuality in the Islamicate tradition, both resulting in the publication of the conference papers: Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, ed., *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam* (Malibu, Calif.: Undena, 1979), and Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi, eds., *Islamicate Sexualities Studies: Translations across Temporal and Geographical Zones of Desire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008). In the latter collection only two papers (by Kathryn Babayan and Sahar Amer) address the question of lesbianism. The most important work conducted on medieval Islamicate male homosexuality by scholars is that of Everett Rowson, Franz Rosenthal, Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, Malek Chebel, Stephen O. Murray, and Will Roscoe, all cited below. In Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe, eds., *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1997) only one essay deals with lesbianism; see Murray, "Woman-Woman Love in Islamic Societies," 97–104. Unfortunately, Murray collapses medieval representations of lesbian practices with Orientalist and modern perspectives.

The term *Islamicate* (in contrast to *Islamic*), which I will use throughout this article, has the advantage of highlighting social and cultural dimensions over religious ones; it was coined by Marshall G. S. Hodgson, who defines it thus: "'Islamicate' would refer not directly

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presence.² For indeed, the cultural and social life of some women in certain medieval Arab courts, including their work and lifestyle, may well unveil unsuspected spaces in which same-sex activities might have occurred. If it is not always clear that these practices could be dubbed lesbian, they may well be considered lesbian-like.

MEDIEVAL ARAB LESBIANS

One might argue that the Arabic terms for “lesbianism” (*sahq*, *sihaq*, and *sihaqa*) and “lesbian” (*sahiq*, *sabhaga*, and *musahiq*) refer primarily to a behavior, an action, rather than an emotional attachment or an identity. The root of these words (*s-h-q*) means “to pound” (as in spices) or “to rub,” so that lesbians (*sahiqat*), like the Greek tribades, are literally those who engage in a pounding or rubbing behavior or who make love by pounding or rubbing. In fact, some medieval medical views of lesbianism, reported in the Arabic sexological tradition, point to rubbing as an essential cause of the practice. Galen, the second-century Greek physician whose own daughter was a lesbian, according to medieval Arabic writers, is supposed to have examined his daughter’s labia and surrounding veins and to have concluded that her lesbianism was due to “an itch between the major and minor labia” that could be soothed only by rubbing them against another woman’s labia.³ Similarly, according to the famous ninth-century Muslim philosopher al-Kindi:

Lesbianism is due to a vapor which, condensed, generates in the labia heat and an itch which only dissolve and become cold through friction and orgasm. When friction and orgasm take place, the heat turns into coldness because the liquid that a woman ejaculates in lesbian intercourse is cold whereas the same liquid that results from sexual

to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims” (*The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vols. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974], 1:59).

² Judith M. Bennett, “‘Lesbian-Like’ and the Social History of Lesbianisms,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9, nos. 1–2 (2000): 1–24.

³ This medical view, attributed to Galen, comes from Abul Hasan Ali ibn Nasr al-Katib, *Encyclopedia of Pleasure*, ed. Salah Addin Khawwam, trans. Adnan Jarkas and Salah Addin Khawwam (Toronto: Aleppo, 1977), 189. This information cannot be corroborated by the surviving evidence from the medieval European medical tradition. In a search for the roots “hetairist-,” “dihetairist-,” “tribad-,” and “lesbia-” in the electronic version of Galen’s surviving Greek works held by the Bibliothèque interuniversitaire de Paris 5 I found no instance of any of those roots being used by him except “lesbia-.” His use of the word *lesbiazonton* appears only once and is cited as an example of a practice he found disgusting. See Galen, *De simplicibus medicinis* 10.1, in *Claudi Galeni opera omnia*, ed. C. G. Kuhn, 20 vols. (Leipzig: Car. Cnoblochii, 1821–33), 12:249, also available online at <http://194.254.96.21/livanc/?cote=45674x12&cp=247&do=page>. I would like to thank Michael McVaugh for helping me with this information concerning the medical tradition on Galen.

union with men is hot. Heat, however, cannot be extinguished by heat; rather, it will increase since it needs to be treated by its opposite. As coldness is repelled by heat, so heat is also repelled by coldness.⁴

In al-Kindi's view, then, the cause of lesbianism is the heat that is generated in the labia and that can be reduced only through friction and orgasm with another woman. Interestingly, it is only friction between two labia that can cure this condition, since it permits the ejaculation of a cold liquid that calms the original heat; the reduction in heat cannot be achieved through intercourse with a man, since the man's liquid is hot and, as al-Kindi points out, "heat . . . cannot be extinguished by heat."

Foreshadowing the medicalization of homosexuality in nineteenth-century Europe, lesbianism in the medieval Islamicate medical tradition seems to have already been regarded as a medical category (though not a deviant one) requiring specific treatment, namely, rubbing. In the ninth century some physicians from the Islamicate world thought of lesbianism as an inborn state caused by the mother's consumption of certain foods that, when passed through the milk during nursing, led to labial itching and lifelong lesbianism. Hence, according to the ninth-century physician Yuhanna ibn Masawayh, known in the medieval European history of science as John Mesué (d. 857), "lesbianism results when a nursing woman eats celery, rocket, melilot leaves and the flowers of a bitter orange tree. When she eats these plants and suckles her child, they will affect the labia of her suckling and generate an itch which the suckling will carry through her future life."⁵ Rubbing is here presented as capable only of relieving, not of curing, the woman; female homosexuality is thus clearly depicted as both innate and lifelong. Such views were standard and were repeated from one century to the next and from one medical treatise on sexualities to the other.⁶

⁴ This quotation by al-Kindi also appears in Ibn Nasr, *Encyclopedia of Pleasure*, 188. Al-Kindi's best-known works focus on the physical sciences—mathematics, optics, meteorology—and not on biology or physiology. According to al-Nadim's *Fihrist*, al-Kindi wrote 270 items, of which about two dozen are medical titles, but none of al-Nadim's titles seem very likely to contain the information found in the *Encyclopedia of Pleasure*, and most of them are known to be no longer extant. See al-Nadim, *al-Fihrist*, ed. Rida Tajaddud (Tehran: Yutlabu min Maktabat al-Asadi wa-Maktabat al-Ja'fari al-Tabrizi, 1971), esp. 315.

⁵ Ibn Nasr, *Encyclopedia of Pleasure*, 189. The titles of Yuhanna ibn Masawayh's (John Mesué) works suggest an interest in women's physiology. Al-Nadim attributed to him the following works, among others: "Why Physicians Have Abstained from Treating Pregnant Women during Certain Months of Their Pregnancy" and "Treatment of Women Who Do Not Become Pregnant" (*al-Fihrist*, 354).

⁶ One finds exactly the same references to the medical origin of lesbianism in Ahmad al-Tifashi's thirteenth-century *Nuzhat al-albab fi ma la yujad fi kitab*, ed. Jamal Juma'a (London: Riad el-Rayyis, 1992), chap. 11, which is devoted to lesbianism. While this chapter is available in a French translation by René R. Khawam, *Les délices des cœurs ou ce que l'on ne trouve en aucun livre* (Paris: Phébus, 1981), it has been omitted from the English translation of this work, *The Delight of Hearts, or What You Will Not Find in Any Book*, trans. Edward A. Lacey

If *sahq* denotes a behavior both etymologically and medically, *culturally speaking* and in the context of medieval Arabic *literary* writings, *sahiqat* (lesbians) were associated rather with love and devotion, and at times they were even known to form an exclusive and supportive subculture. As a matter of fact, the origin of lesbianism, according to popular anecdotes in the Arabic literary tradition, is regularly traced back forty years before the emergence of male homosexuality to an intercultural, interfaith love affair between an Arab woman and a Christian woman in pre-Islamic Iraq. The earliest extant erotic treatise in Arabic, *Jawami' al-ladhdha* (*Encyclopedia of Pleasure*), dates to about the end of the tenth century and was written by a certain Abul Hasan Ali ibn Nasr al-Katib.⁷ It tells us the story of the first lesbian couple, the enduring love between Hind Bint al-Nu'man, the Christian daughter of the last Lakhmid king of Hira in the seventh century, and Hind Bint al-Khuss al-Iyadiyyah from Yamama in Arabia, known as al-Zarqa' and reportedly the first lesbian in Arab history:

She [Hind] was so loyal to al-Zarqa' that when the latter died, she cropped her hair, wore black clothes, rejected worldly pleasures, vowed to God that she would lead an ascetic life until she passed away and, as a result, she built a monastery which was named after her, on the outskirts of Kufa. When she died, she was buried at the monastery gate. Her loyalty was then an example for poets to write about. There are also other women who continued to shed tears on their beloved ones' graves until they passed away.⁸

(San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1988). Other medical views on the causes of lesbianism included speculations about the size of the vagina, the desire to avoid adultery, and the fear of begetting illegitimate children.

⁷ If the *Encyclopedia of Pleasure* is indeed the first extant erotic treatise in Arabic, it is not the first one in the Arabic tradition. Two of the best-known titles that predate ibn Nasr's work but that have not survived are, first, *Sihag al-nisa' zinan baynahunna* (Women's Tribadism Constitutes Fornication between Them), which technically is a legal opinion rather than an erotic treatise (it is ascribed to the Syrian jurist Makhul [d. ca. 733]), and, second, Abul-'Anbas al-Saymari, *Kitab al-sahagat* (Book on Lesbians), which dates from the end of the ninth century. See al-Nadim, *al-Fihrist*, 376, and *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Liwat" and "Sihak."

⁸ The Lakhmid dynasty evolved from a pre-Islamic Bedouin tribe into a kingdom in the late third century C.E. and became vassals of Sassanian Persia in the seventh century. Hira is a city near Kufa in the south of present-day Iraq. The extract is taken from ibn Nasr, *Encyclopedia of Pleasure*, 88. This anecdote already appeared in Abu al-Faraj al-Isbahani (d. ca. 972), *Kitab al-aghani* (Book of Songs), 24 vols. (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub, 1927–74), 2:31–32. It was later repeated by others, such as al-Raghib al-Isfahani (fl. ca. 1000), *Muhadarat al-udaba' wa-muhawarat al-shu'ara' wa-al-bulagha'* (The Ready Replies of Cultured Men and Poets' and Orators' Conversation), 4 vols. (Beirut: Dar Maktabat al-Hayah, 1961), cited in Everett Rowson, "The Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity in Medieval Arabic Vice Lists," in *Bodyguards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991), 68. As in the West, the origin of homosexuality

Even though it is impossible to ascertain the veracity of this account, the fact that it continued to circulate throughout the Islamic world is sufficient to demonstrate that lesbianism was thought to be far more than a medical condition and a simple sexual practice. In the *Encyclopedia of Pleasure* this lesbian love story is praised and presented as evidence of the greater loyalty and devotion that women have for their female partners compared to heterosexual men's attachment to women. Ibn Nasr cited the following verses written by an unnamed (presumably male) poet about the love of Hind for al-Zarqa': "O Hind, you are truer to your word than men. / Oh, the difference between your loyalty and theirs!"⁹

If the relationship between Hind and al-Zarqa' is the one most often cited in the Arabic erotic tradition on lesbianism, it is not the only lesbian relation in Arabic literary history. In fact, in *al-Fihrist* (The Catalog), al-Nadim (d. ca. 995) listed the names of twelve lesbian couples who were known in the tenth century but about whom nothing else has been preserved. Because al-Nadim lists every Arabic book of which he was aware, we know from his inventory about the existence of twelve books dating before the end of the tenth century devoted to named lesbian couples. (All the titles given are named after characters, presumably the lesbian couples whose story each book tells. Since all Arabic names have specific meanings, I provide in parentheses a translation of some of the more intriguing ones.) These works are the Book of Rihana and Qoronfel (literally, the Book of Basil and Clove); the Book of Ruqayya and Khadija; the Book of Mo'ees and Zakiyya; the Book of Sakina and al-Rabab (of Calm and the Mistress of the Household); the Book of al-Ghatrifa and al-Dhulafa'; the Book of Hind and Bint al-Nu'man (of India and the Daughter of al-Nu'man, undoubtedly the couple described above); the Book of 'Abda al-'Aqila and 'Abda al-Ghaddara (of the Wise Slave Girl and the Treacherous Slave Girl); the Book of Lu'lu'a and Shatira; the Book of Najda and Zu'um; the Book of Salma and Su'ad; the Book of Sawab and Surur (of Justice and Happiness); the Book of al-Dahma' and Ni'ma (of the Dark One and the Gift from God).¹⁰

In the medieval Arabic literary erotic tradition, as in the Kama-sutra, from which it may have borrowed elements, lesbians are said to have formed groups, to have held meetings, and to have led schools in which they taught other lesbians how best to achieve pleasure. The thirteenth-century Tunisian

in the Arab world seems to be that it was "imported" from elsewhere. In the case of the Arabs al-Jahiz popularized the idea that it spread to the Muslim world at the time of the Abbasids from the military lifestyle of the Khurasanians. According to G. E. von Grunebaum, writings about homosexuality coincided with a shift toward an urban setting and a shift of the political center of Islam toward the East; see his "Aspects of Arabic Urban Literature Mostly in the Ninth and Tenth Century," *al-Andalus* 20 (1955): 259–81.

⁹ Ibn Nasr, *Encyclopedia of Pleasure*, 88.

¹⁰ Al-Nadim, *al-Fihrist*, 366.

physician, philosopher, and poet Shihab al-Din Ahmad al-Tifashi in his *Nuzhat al-albab fi ma la yujad fi kitab* (literally, a Promenade of the Hearts in What Does Not Exist in Any Book), for instance, gives some fascinating information about a “lesbian community” and the same-sex teachings of Rose, the head lesbian therein.¹¹ Similar groups of lesbians are evoked by Leo Africanus, the fifteenth-century traveler from Granada, in his account of female diviners of Fez (in modern Morocco). Interestingly, in his travel narrative written in Italian Leo Africanus described these groups as *suhaqiyat*, the Arabic word for lesbians.¹²

Al-Tifashi also provided in his *Nuzhat al-albab* specific examples of the teachings of famous medieval lesbians, notably on the most successful sounds that ought to accompany lesbian sexual practices. He related the following advice given by an experienced lesbian mother to her daughter: “You should snort heartily while wiggling lasciviously.”¹³ A bit later in the text al-Tifashi spoke of “wheezing, panting, purring, murmurs, heartbreaking sighs.”¹⁴ The most striking depiction of lesbian sexual practices in al-Tifashi’s *Nuzhat al-albab* is perhaps his portrayal of lesbian sex, which he dubbed “the saffron massage”:

The tradition between women in the game of love necessitates that the lover places herself above and the beloved underneath—unless the former is too light or the second too developed: and in this case, the lighter one places herself underneath, and the heavier one on top, because her weight will facilitate the rubbing, and will allow the friction to be more effective. This is how they act: the one that must stay underneath lies on her back, stretches out one leg and bends the other while leaning slightly to the side, therefore offering her opening (vagina) wide open: meanwhile, the other lodges her bent leg in her groin, puts the lips of her vagina between the lips that are offered for her, and begins to rub the vagina of her companion in an up and down, and down and up, movement that jerks the whole body. This operation is

¹¹ Al-Tifashi, *Nuzhat al-albab*, 257, English translation mine; cf. Khawam, *Les délices des coeurs*, 257. Interestingly, in his colorful survey of the sexual customs of the East Allen Edwardes confirms the survival of such lesbian practices taught among harem women: “In the restricted harem, *esh-shaykheh-el-bezzreh* (one who teaches the art of rubbing clitoris against clitoris) taught every girl in the Sapphic sciences” (*The Jewel in the Lotus: A Historical Survey of the Sexual Culture of the East* [New York: Julian Press, 1959], 255). Even though rumors of lesbianism in Oriental harems have been regularly reported by Orientalist (male) writers and travelers, they have never been observed or verified. We cannot thus entirely trust the association between harem and lesbian practices. Nevertheless, the parallel between al-Tifashi’s and Edwardes’s reports is striking.

¹² Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim between Worlds* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 201.

¹³ Al-Tifashi, *Nuzhat al-albab*, 238 (English translation mine); cf. Khawam, *Les délices des coeurs*, 252–53.

¹⁴ Al-Tifashi, *Nuzhat al-albab*, 243 (English translation mine); cf. Khawam, *Les délices des coeurs*, 258.

dubbed “the saffron massage” because this is precisely how one grinds saffron on the cloth when dyeing it. The operation must focus each time on one lip in particular, the right one for example, and then the other: the woman will then slightly change position in order to apply better friction to the left lip . . . and she does not stop acting in this manner until her desires and those of her partner are fulfilled. I assure you that it is absolutely useless to try to press the two lips together at the same time, because the area from which pleasure comes would then not be exposed. Finally, let us note that in this game the two partners may be aided by a little willow oil, scented with musk.¹⁵

Needless to say, stories and descriptions such as these are significant for the history of lesbianism, not least because they have few equivalents in medieval European literature.¹⁶ Arab lesbians were both named and visible in medieval Arabic literature. Moreover, and in contrast to their status in the medieval West in the same period, for example, Arab lesbians were not considered guilty of a “silent sin,” and there is no clear evidence that their “crime” was punished by death.¹⁷ In fact, lesbianism in the medieval Islamic literary world was a topic deemed worthy of discussion and a lifestyle worthy of emulation. I do not wish to imply here that medieval Arabic literature on sexuality was either prolesbian or profeminist—far from it. The Arabic writings that have survived focus on men much more than on women; they remain for the most part phallogocentric and ultimately reflect a male perspective. Whenever they are mentioned in the erotic literary tradition, lesbians occupy only one chapter. Even the *Encyclopedia of Pleasure* spoke much more loudly about men and male homosexuality. Nevertheless, the material on lesbianism in the Arabic literary Middle Ages, while undoubtedly a smaller proportion in the

¹⁵ Al-Tifashi, *Nuzhat al-albab*, 237–38 (English translation mine); cf. Khawam, *Les délices des cœurs*, 251–52.

¹⁶ See Sahar Amer, *Crossing Borders: Love between Women in Medieval French and Arabic Literatures* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

¹⁷ In the late medieval West Jean Gerson, the fifteenth-century rector of the University of Paris, described lesbians’ lustful act as one in which “women have each other by detestable and horrible means which *should not be named or written*.” One hundred years later, in his gloss of Spain’s medieval law code, the *Siete partidas*, Gregory Lopez alluded to the sin “against nature” as “the silent sin [*peccatum mutum*].” See Jean Gerson, *Confessional ou directoire des confesseurs* (n.d., late fifteenth century), in *Oeuvres complètes de Jean Gerson*, ed. Palémon Glorieux, 10 vols. (Paris: Desclée, 1960), 1:85, cited in Judith C. Brown, *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 19, emphasis mine; and Gregorio Lopez, *Las siete partidas del sabio rey don Alonso el Nono, nuevamente glosadas por el licenciado Gregorio Lopez*, 4 vols. (1565; repr. Salamanca, 1829–31), 3:178, cited in Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 19, emphasis mine. There is a very large body of scholarship discussing the death penalty as punishment for lesbianism in the medieval West. For an overview see Derrick S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (1955; Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1975); Pierre J. Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code, 550–1150* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984); and Louis Crompton, “The Myth of Lesbian Impunity: Capital Laws from 1270 to 1791,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 6, nos. 1–2 (1980–81): 11–25.

overall economy of medieval Arabic sexological writings and at times even contradictory, is significant and merits investigation.

The surprisingly positive valuation of lesbianism and homosexuality in medieval Arabic literary writings is most likely a consequence of the general commendation of eroticism and (hetero)sexual practice in Arab and Islamate discourses. Not only is sexuality explicitly celebrated in a large number of medieval Arabic scientific and literary texts, but sexuality is positioned at the very heart of religious piety. In contrast to medieval Christianity, for example, sex is not a sin in Islam, and heterosexual desire (whether in marriage or concubinage) is viewed as both licit and desirable. The Qur'an itself describes Paradise in sexual terms and proclaims the primacy of physical sensual pleasures.¹⁸

It is worth noting that the principal and most vehemently condemned sexual sin in the theological Islamic discourse is adultery (*zina*) and not homosexuality (*liwat*). In Islam *zina* is defined very specifically as vaginal intercourse between a man and a woman who is neither his lawful wife nor his concubine. Much more than same-sex desire, *zina* is emphatically and unambiguously condemned in both the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the early Islamic legal tradition) and served traditionally as the focus of Islamic jurisprudence. Interestingly, the interest in *zina* may have encouraged, at least partly, the acceptance of *liwat* in Islamate societies. This is what ibn Falita, the fourteenth-century author of *Rushd al-labib ila mu'asharat al-habib* (*An Intelligent Man's Guide to the Art of Coition*), suggested in his chapter on lesbianism: "Know that lesbianism insures against social disgrace, while coition is forbidden except through marriage."¹⁹ This perspective is so embedded in medieval Arabic writings on homosexuality that Everett Rowson, the leading scholar of medieval Islamate homosexuality, has concluded that "because of the cult of female virginity and the dependence of a man's honor on the chastity of his female relations, heterosexual philanderers were in fact playing a more dangerous game than *lutis* [homosexual men], and an argument could be made for a shift over time in the weight of societal disapproval towards the former and away from the latter."²⁰

¹⁸ On the positive role that sex plays in the Qur'an see Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *La sexualité en Islam* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1986); Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel* (Paris: Denoel, 1983); and Abdelkebir Khatibi, *La blessure du nom propre* (Paris: Denoel, 1986). In contrast, Franz Rosenthal warns that the description of Paradise as a sensual erotic Eden in Islam should not be taken to exclusively mean that unbridled sexuality was permitted on earth. He gives the example of ibn Hazm, who interprets such verses as pointing rather to "the disruptive potential of sexuality for the smooth functioning of the social order" (Rosenthal, "Fiction and Reality: Sources for the Role of Sex in Medieval Muslim Society," in Marsot, *Society and the Sexes*, 6).

¹⁹ Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Falita, *An Intelligent Man's Guide to the Art of Coition*, ed. Salah Addin Khawwam, trans. Adnan Jarkas and Salah Addin Khawwam (Toronto: Aleppo, 1977), 100. The Arabic edition is *Rushd al-labib ila mu'asharat al-habib*, ed. Ahmad ben Mohamed al-Yamani (Talah, Lebanon: al-Mayah al-Jamahiriyyah al-'Uzma, 2002).

²⁰ Rowson, "Categorization of Gender," 62.

Because the Qur'an did not prescribe a specific punishment for homosexuals, and despite general agreement among Islamic jurists that homosexuality was one of the major sins (*kaba'ir*), there existed no consensus regarding its punishment, which varied according to the traditional schools of Islamic legal thought (*madhahib*).²¹ The Maliki school (which was the strictest one in this regard and followed especially in North Africa during the medieval era) considered *liwat* to be more serious than *zina* and thus deserving the harshest of *hadd* penalties (those defined in the Qur'an and the Sunnah and not left to the judge's discretion), namely, stoning to death for both partners. This school is said, however, to have permitted homosexual practices between a man and his male slaves. The Shafi'i school (followed especially in Egypt and Syria) assimilated *zina* and *liwat* and thus distinguished between married and unmarried homosexuals and between active and passive partners. It condemned partners accordingly to be stoned to death (if married) or lashed (if unmarried). The most "liberal" school, the Hanafi (the school associated with Iraq and with the Persian- and Turkish-speaking regions of the Islamic world), prescribed a *ta'zir* punishment, that is, a discretionary penalty aimed to punish, reform, and deter others and that amounted to no more than ten lashes and a term of imprisonment. It must be noted that all these punishments addressed *liwat* understood only as anal penetration by a man. Kissing, caressing, *tafkhidh* (intercrural intercourse), and the like, while considered reprehensible, were technically not *liwat* and thus were not subject to these penalties.

Though also considered a sin, *sahq* was generally deemed to be a less serious offense than *liwat* and the least serious form of *zina*, since it did not involve penetration by a man. It was hence given a lesser punishment than either *liwat* or *zina*, although its sentence varied also among different jurists. While some theologians prescribed one hundred lashes, the eleventh-century theologian from Córdoba, ibn Hazm, prescribed the *ta'zir* punishment (ten lashes, and it remains unclear whether a prison term was also required or not), and others did not penalize it at all. In most legal compendia of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) *sahq* is not even regularly addressed.

SEXUAL CATEGORIZATION AND SEXUAL DEVIANCE IN THE EAST AND IN THE WEST

From the existence of a category of lesbianism in medieval Arabic writings and from the information gathered about Arabic (literary) lesbian

²¹ On the punishments for *liwat* and *sahq* in Islamic jurisprudence see Camilla Adang, "Ibn Hazm on Homosexuality: A Case-Study of Zahirī Legal Methodology," *al-Qantara* 24 (2003): 5–31; Rowson, "Categorization of Gender," 59–62; Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, "Sexuality, Diversity, and Ethics in the Agenda of Progressive Muslims," in *Progressive Muslims: Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, ed. Omid Safi (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 216–19; Bouhdiba, *Sexualité en Islam*, 44–45; and Khaled el-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), esp. chap. 3.

subcultures, we must not rush to equate the medieval Arabic Islamicate notions of female-female sexuality with modern Western notions of lesbianism and sexual identity, for the very categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality are modern Western concepts, as many scholars have demonstrated, and do not have parallels in the medieval Arabic tradition. Even if medieval Arabic erotic writings are obsessed with identifying and defining all forms of sexual practices and thus regularly use a rich and precise vocabulary, including the terms *sahq* (lesbianism), *sahiqat* (lesbians), *mutazarrifat* (elegant courtly ladies-lovers), *haba'ib* (beloveds), *liwat* (active male homosexuality), *luti* (active male homosexual), *ubnah* (passive male homosexuality), *ma'bun* (passive male homosexual), *qatim* (passive male homosexual in Andalusian dialect), *tafkhidh* (intercruel intercourse), *bidal* or *mubadala* (taking turns in active and passive homosexuality), as well as *nisa' mudhakkarat* (masculinized women) and *rijal mu'annathin* (feminized men) or *mukhannath* (male effeminate), no medieval Arabic word existed for the sort of bisexuality that was considered as the unmarked, most common form of sexual practice, for heterosexuality, or even for sexuality.

The contemporary Arabic word *jins*, used today to refer to sexuality, did not acquire this connotation until the early twentieth century.²² Up to that time, *jins* (derived from the Greek *genos*) denoted only type, kind, and ethnolinguistic origin. Its connotation of biological sex, national origin, and citizenship is a modern development, resulting from Arabic translations of Freud in the 1950s and of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* in the 1990s.²³ Interestingly, the impact of these Western medical and theoretical ideas about (homo)sexuality on the Arab world has led to the replacement of the medieval Arabic terms *liwat* and, to a lesser extent, *sahq* with *mithliyyah* (sameness) to mean homosexuality and *ghayriyyah* (differentness) to mean heterosexuality and even more recently with *al-shudhudh al-jinsi* (sexually rare, unusual, or odd) as an equivalent for the Western concept of queer. The notions of sexuality, heterosexuality, and homosexuality as sexual deviance seem thus to be part of the Western imperial legacy to the Arab world today. Ironically, and despite its promise of "modernizing" and "liberating," the hegemony of the Western cultural and intellectual capital has ended by erasing the more extensive and flexible medieval Arabic model of sexuality, declared it "deviant," and imposed instead a binary view of sexuality onto the Arab world.

²² This section on the terminology of sexuality and heterosexuality in the contemporary Middle East is indebted to Joseph Massad's article "Re-orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World," *Public Culture* 14, no. 2 (2002): 361–85, esp. 371–72, and Kugle, "Sexuality, Diversity, and Ethics," 199–201.

²³ Mustafa Safwan first translated Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* as *Tafsir al-ablam* (1958; Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1969); Jurj Tarabishi first translated Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* as *Thalathat mababith fi nazariyyat al-jins* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'ah, 1983); and Muta al-Safadi first translated Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, as *Iradat al ma'rifah, al-juz' al-awwal min tarikh al-jinsaniyya* (Beirut: Markaz al-Inma al Qawmi, 1990).

MEDIEVAL ARAB LESBIAN-LIKE WOMEN

Any attempt to trace the literary history of medieval Arab lesbianism must extend beyond the spaces where Arab lesbians were linguistically named and their sexual practices explicitly depicted. In parallel to the overt descriptions of lesbian sexual practices in medieval Arabic writings (erotic, theological, or medical) one also encounters numerous examples of eroticized gender bending in Arabic literature. Tales of cross-dressed heroines, including stories of female warriors and Amazons, poems describing slave girls dressed as male cupbearers, little-known *sufi* (mystical) rituals, the ambiguous use of masculine pronouns to refer to the beloved in the courtly lyric, and even the social practices of some women in Islamicate courts are some of the unrecognized spaces where expressions of homoeroticism in the medieval Arabic tradition may well have occurred. Many of the same cultural elements have been identified by modern critics as key narrative strategies for the exploration of same-sex desire in medieval European writings and, accordingly, have been dubbed "second-degree homosexuality."²⁴ Yet the same practices have failed to draw a similar attention from Arabists, even though they permeate medieval Arabic writings.

One could argue that the study of medieval European homosexuality had to resort to the exploration of second-degree homosexuality only because overt depictions of same-sex desire are lacking. The situation of Arabic literature, as we have seen above, is quite different. If female homoeroticism is explicitly identified and articulated in medieval Arabic writings, one might argue, why search for indirect discourses? I would like to posit that an exploration of the multiple spaces in which expressions, both explicit and implicit, of same-sex desire occurred in medieval Arabic writings leads to a richer understanding of same-sex sexuality in the Islamicate world. Such an approach is useful because it gives us a glimpse of the complex and at times contradictory currents that circulated beneath the literary representations of lesbianism in the medieval Islamicate world. Because implicit expressions of lesbianism in medieval Arabic literature have not been explored, I propose some directions for future research that I hope will enrich, expand, and complicate our conception of female homoeroticism in the medieval Islamicate world.

Arabists can indeed fruitfully heed Judith Bennett's call to broaden the investigation of lesbianism to include "women whose lives might have particularly offered opportunities for same-sex love; women who resisted norms of feminine behavior based on heterosexual marriage; women who lived in circumstances that allowed them to nurture and support other

²⁴ This expression was coined by Michèle Perret, "Travesties et transsexuelles: Yde, Silence, Grisandole, Blanchandine," *Romance Notes* 25, no. 3 (1985): 328. See also Christiane Marchello-Nizia and Michèle Perret, "Une utopie homosexuelle au quatorzième siècle: L'île sans femmes d'Agriano," *Stanford French Review* 14, nos. 1-2 (1990): 233.

women.”²⁵ If these are the women whom Bennett dubs lesbian-like, this is how she describes the “range of practices” that such women might engage in and that scholars might search for:

If women’s primary emotions were directed toward other women, regardless of their own sexual practices, perhaps their affection was lesbian-like. If women lived in single-sex communities, their life circumstances might be usefully conceptualized as lesbian-like. If women resisted marriage or, indeed, just did not marry, whatever the reason, their singleness can be seen as lesbian-like. If women dressed as men, whether in response to saintly voices, in order to study, in pursuit of certain careers, or just to travel with male lovers, their cross-dressing was arguably lesbian-like. And if women worked as prostitutes or otherwise flouted norms of sexual propriety, we might see their deviance as lesbian-like.²⁶

Bennett’s category of lesbian-like has many advantages, not least that of being more specifically sexual than Adrienne Rich’s “lesbian continuum,” which included all woman-identified experiences.²⁷ It also possesses undeniable value for the study of literary Arab lesbians in the Middle Ages because the range of practices that Bennett describes permeates much of medieval Arabic writings. Diverse as literary medieval Arab lesbians may be, many displayed primary emotional attachments to other women; most lived in exclusively female quarters, cross-dressed, or at times prostituted themselves; and some were surprisingly autonomous from male control. The literary representations of such characters in medieval Arabic texts, while not explicitly lesbian, may certainly be considered lesbian-like. The study of such characters is pertinent, therefore, to the history of medieval Arab lesbianism.

In the caliphate court of ninth-century Baghdad, for example, the tradition of *ghulamīyyat*, slave girls who cross-dressed as boys (at times even with painted mustaches) may be an unsuspected space in which same-sex attachments could have taken place. This courtly tradition, which soon became the cultural fashion eagerly imitated even by upper-class Baghdadi women, is said to have been launched by Zubayda, wife of Harun al-Rashid and mother of Caliph al-Amin (and patron of Abu Nuwas [d. 814], one of the most famous early Arab poets of male homoeroticism), in an effort to deter her son from his homosexual inclinations:

Zubaida, noticing her son’s marked taste for these eunuchs and the ascendancy they were gaining over him, chose young girls remarkable for the elegance of their figures and the charm of their faces. She had

²⁵ Bennett, “Lesbian-Like,” 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁷ Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” *Signs* 5, no. 4 (1980): 631–60.

them wear turbans and gave them clothes woven and embroidered in the royal factories, and had them fix their hair with fringes and love-locks and draw it back at the nape of the neck after the fashion of young men. She dressed them in close-fitting wide-sleeved robes called *qaba* and wide belts which showed off their waists and their curves. Then she sent them off to her son. Amin, as they filed into his presence, was enchanted. He was captivated by their looks and appeared with them in public. It was then that the fashion for having young slave girls with short hair, wearing *qaba* and belts, became established at all levels of society. They were called "page-girls."²⁸

While some critics have pointed out that this prevalent practice of cross-dressed women ought not be interpreted as evidence of medieval Arab lesbianism since their role was to compete with boys for the attention of men, we may say that such cross-dressing can nevertheless be considered lesbian-like. After all, the *ghulamīyyat* tradition, especially once it spread to the urban milieu of ninth-century Baghdad, may have been a liberating fashion, at least for some medieval Arab lesbians who might have used it to symbolize their dissociation from other female gender expectations.²⁹

Instances of female cross-dressing are not only present in the social history of the Islamicate world but are abundant also in the medieval Arabic literary tradition. In fact, the poetry of Abu Nuwas boasts an entire genre devoted to the *ghulamīyyat* in which the beloved is a woman dressed as a man.³⁰ Similarly, the tales of *Alf layla wa layla* (*A Thousand and One Nights*), although difficult to date, and the Islamic and pre-Islamic *siyar shaʿbiyya* (Arabic folk romances), which survive from at least the early eleventh century on, offer countless examples of women warriors and amazons. In *A Thousand and One Nights* some of the most celebrated examples include the characters of Abriza, whose story is embedded in the

²⁸ On the *ghulamīyyat* tradition see Masʿudi, *The Meadows of Gold: The Abbasids*, ed. and trans. Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone (London: Kegan Paul International, 1989), 390–91; Habib Zayyat, "al-Marʾa al-ghulamīyya fi al-Islam" (The *Ghulamīyya* in Islamicate Culture), *al-Machriq* 50 (1956): 153–92; and Philip F. Kennedy, *Abu Nuwas: A Genius of Poetry* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005).

²⁹ Critics who warn against interpreting the *ghulamīyyat* tradition as evidence of lesbian practices include Everett Rowson, "Categorization of Gender," 68. The parallel I am drawing between the category "lesbian-like" and what was seemingly a fashionable behavior at the time is consistent with the way homosexuality was viewed during the early Abbasid period. In a famous poem by the eighth-century poet al-Raqashi homosexuality was indeed broadcast among the fashionable misbehaviors of the time, along with wine drinking, gambling, cockfights, and dogfights. This poem is cited in Franz Rosenthal, "Male and Female: Described and Compared," in *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature*, ed. J. W. Wright, Jr., and Everett K. Rowson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 48n31.

³⁰ On Abu Nuwas's *ghulamīyyat* poetry see Ewald Wagner, *Abu Nuwas: Eine Studie zur arabischen Literatur der frühen Abbasidenzeit* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Franz Steiner, 1965); and Abu Nuwas, *Abu Nuwas: Le vin, le vent, la vie: Poèmes traduits*, trans. Vincent Monteil (Paris: Sindbad, 1979).

tale of `Umar al-Nu`man, Princesses Boudour and Hayat el-Nefous in the story of Qamar al-Zaman and the Princess Boudour, or the island of Waq, which is inhabited exclusively by women and depicted in the tale of Hasan al-Basra. In the Arabic folk romances representative examples of cross-dressed women warriors and Amazons include Princess `Ain al-Hayat in *Qissat Firuz Shah* (The Story of the Shah Firuz); the characters of Queen al-Rabab, al-Ghayda', Ghamra, and Nitra in *Sirat Antar* (The Romance of Antar); the characters of Fatima, Alûf, al-Samta', Nûrâ, and Zanânîr in *Sirat Dhat al-Himma* (The Epic of Dhat al-Himma); Princess Turbân in *Sirat Hamza al-Bahlawan* (The Romance of Hamza al-Bahlawan); and the female army of Munyat al-Huda and the all-female Isles of Waq al-Waq in *Sirat Hayy ben Yaqzan* (The Epic of Hayy ben Yaqzan).³¹

The presence of one or more cross-dressed heroines in each of these texts gives rise to a multitude of ambiguous situations, while the women's frequent obsession with warrior activities and their aversion or categorical refusal to marry (often until defeated in combat) invite an exploration and an interrogation of gender, sexual hierarchy, and power relations. In addition, if some of the female characters in *Dhat al-Himma* may be considered lesbian-like because of their voiced lack of interest in men, some can certainly be viewed as lesbians, especially when they express their marked preference for women. Alûf, for instance, asserts: "I do neither long for marriage nor for men, but my heart has an inclination for the ladies." Similarly, Nûrâ is said to "love women and detest men," while Zanânîr "does not even feel desire towards young men."³² Even though almost all the female characters in these popular Arabic epics eventually end up marrying men, these Arabic texts betray an ambivalence toward heterosexuality as the only form of sexual relations for women and portray lesbianism as an alternative if not viable parallel form of sexual practice. Because of the sheer length of these Arabic texts (estimated to be thousands of folios for popular romances alone), critical work on these stories has been limited to typological surveys

³¹ These Arabic folk and epic romances likely circulated in some early form during the eighth and ninth centuries, though they were mostly written down between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. There is a great deal of borrowing between *A Thousand and One Nights* and Arabic folk romances. On their interaction see Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London: Penguin, 1994), 88–89. On cross-dressing in *A Thousand and One Nights* see *ibid.*, 159–77. On the Arabic folk and epic romances see M. C. Lyons, *The Arabic Epic: Heroic and Oral Story-Telling*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). For an overview of women warriors in the Arabic tradition see Remke Kruk, "The Bold and the Beautiful: Women and 'fitna' in the *Sirat Dhat al-Himma*: The Story of Nura," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, ed. Gavin R. G. Hambly (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 99–116; Remke Kruk, "Clipped Wings: Medieval Arabic Adaptations of the Amazon Myth," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 1, no. 2 (1994): 132–51; and Remke Kruk, "Warrior Women in Arabic Popular Romance: Qannasa Bint Muzahim and Other Valiant Ladies," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 24 (1993): 213–30 (pt. 1) and 25 (1994): 16–33 (pt. 2).

³² These quotations of Alûf, Nûrâ, and Zanânîr in *Dhat al-Himma* come from Remke Kruk, "Warrior Women," 222–24.

of themes and motifs. Only recently have several young scholars begun to reread these famous Arabic epics and various tales from *A Thousand and One Nights* and to uncover the endless possibilities of gender bending and gender trouble that these texts invite through their literary depictions of cross-dressing and of lesbian-like attachments.³³

Cross-dressing is not the only narrative strategy that permits the exploration of second-degree homosexuality in the medieval Islamicate tradition. The life of mystics constitutes another promising source for the exploration of same-sex desire and intimate alternative attachments in the medieval Islamicate world. Indeed, in the eleventh century the meditative practice among Sufi mystics of *nazar*, “the contemplation of a beautiful pubescent boy, who was considered a ‘witness’ (*shahid*) to the beauty of God and the glory of His creation,” gave rise to yet another perhaps controversial space for the potential development of same-sex conduct.³⁴ *Nazar* often became associated with male homoerotic sentiments despite the attempt by some schools of thought, Shafi’i in particular, to distinguish between gazing on boys with lust, which was sinful, and gazing without lust, which was permitted. While a comparatively small proportion of information has survived about women Sufis generally (their stories were simply added as appendices to biographies of male saints), no information has survived documenting the existence of a parallel *nazar* practice among female Sufis. Yet despite the fact that the *nazar* question has been formulated exclusively from a male point of view in the Islamic tradition, it is not impossible that such a tradition was also observed among female Muslim mystics. If so, it could constitute another heretofore unexplored space for the development of lesbian or lesbian-like attachments. More research needs to be conducted on the practices of medieval Muslim Sufi women to reveal the details of their mystical experiences and visions.

One of the most significant cultural practices in the medieval Arab Islamicate world that holds great promise for the study of lesbian-like attachments is undoubtedly that of *zarf*, a tradition that has been commonly translated as “refinement,” “stylishness,” or “courtliness.” It is a cultural practice that began in Medina in Arabia during the pre- and early Islamic eras, then spread from there to the urban centers of the Islamicate world from east to west. This tradition, followed by men and

³³ See *ibid.*; see also Alexandra Cuffel, “Reorienting Christian ‘Amazons’: Christian Women Warriors in Medieval Islamic Literature in the Context of the Crusades,” in *Crossing Boundaries: Gender, Religion, and Culture in the Pre-Modern World*, ed. Brian Britt and Alexandra Cuffel (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 137–66; Amer, *Crossing Borders*; and Sahar Amer, “Cross-Dressing and Female Same-Sex Marriage in Medieval French and Arabic Literatures,” in Babayan and Najmabadi, *Islamicate Sexualities Studies*, 72–113.

³⁴ Rowson, “Categorization of Gender,” 62. On the practice of *nazar* see Annemarie Schimmel, “Eros—Heavenly and Not So Heavenly—in Sufi Literature and Life,” in Marsot, *Society and the Sexes*, 119–41. Because Sufis only contemplated boys and never women, they were frequently disparaged for their sexual depravity and corruption.

women alike, centered on the promotion of a nexus of behaviors that involved an overarching sophistication in clothing, food, language, and home decoration as well as an intellectual atmosphere in which participants engaged in debates related to love, recited poetry, sang, danced, and told stories. This tradition encouraged the development and circulation of the bawdy literature of *mujun* (libertinage), which even included treatises on copulation (*kutub al-bah*).³⁵ Women played a prominent role in the development of *zarf* by holding literary salons to which they invited not only members of the aristocracy but also the increasingly wealthy bourgeoisie, enriched by trade and international commerce. If the activities in which these women engaged cannot always be specifically labeled lesbian, the lifestyles that they led, their surprising independence from male control, and the androgynous nature of the poetry they transmitted may certainly be considered lesbian-like.

Much has been written on the development of *zarf* throughout the Islamic world, and much survives from the centuries in which the practice flourished. The most important source of our knowledge of medieval Arab courtly practices remains undoubtedly the *Kitab al-zarf wa al-zurafa'* (Book of Refinement and Refined People), also known as the *Kitab al-muwashsha'* (literally, the Varicolored Book), written by a tenth-century grammarian from Baghdad, Mohammed ibn al-Washsha' (d. 936).³⁶ In it he describes at length how the *zurafas* (refined courtly men) and *mutazarrafat* (refined courtly ladies, but a term also used for lesbians) adorned their homes with poetry, which was sculpted on their doors, windows, ceilings, beds, tables, and sofas, or decorated pillows, curtains, rings, shoes, belts, and other items of clothing with poetic verses that were luxuriously embroidered with gold and precious stones.

³⁵ On *mujun* as a literary genre rather than a sociological phenomenon whose main features are sexuality and scatology see Julie Scott Meisami, "Arabic *Mujun* Poetry: The Literary Dimension," in *Verse and the Fair Sex: Studies in Poetry and in the Representation of Women in Arabic Literature: A Collection of Papers Presented at the 15th Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants*, ed. Frederick de Jong (Utrecht: M. Th. Houtsma Stichting, 1993), 8–30; and Irwin, *The Arabian Nights*, 165–67.

³⁶ Mohammed ibn al-Washsha', *Kitab al-muwashsha'*, ed. R. E. Brünnow (Leiden: Brill, 1886). This work has recently been translated into French by Siham Bouhlal as *Le livre du brocart* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004). Another important medieval source on *zarf* is Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *al-Mustazraf min akhbar al-jawari* (Courtly Tales of Slave Girl Stories), ed. Ahmad 'Abd al-Fattah Tammam (Cairo: Maktabat al-Turath al-Islami, 1989). Useful secondary sources written in European languages on *zarf* include Malek Chebel, *Traité du raffinement* (Paris: Payot, 1995); Mohammed Ferid Ghazi, "Un groupe social: 'Les raffinés' (*Zurafa'*)," *Studia Islamica* 11 (1959–60): 39–71; Lois A. Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre* (New York: New York University Press, 1971); Jean-Claude Vadet, *L'esprit courtois en orient dans les cinq premiers siècles de l'hégire* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1968), 317–51. A useful Arabic secondary source on *zarf* is al-Bashir Majdub, *Al-Zarf bi-al-'Iraq fi al-'asr al-'Abbasi* (Courtliness in Iraq during the Abbasid Period) (Tunis: Nashr wa-Tawzi' Mu'assasat 'Abd al-Karim Bin 'Abd Allah, 1992).

The case of Wallada (d. 1087 or 1091) deserves mention in this regard. She was a daughter of Muhammad III (ruled 1024–25), also known as al-Mustakfi, the caliph of Córdoba (the capital of Islamic al-Andalus in modern Spain). More important, Wallada unquestionably stands as the archetype of the practitioner of *zarf* and thus also of the unparalleled refinement of the Andalusian aristocracy in the eleventh century and of women's unsuspected sexual freedom. Hostess of a literary salon in eleventh-century Córdoba, Wallada defied convention, as she is said to have openly entertained two male lovers (Ibn Zaydun and Ibn `Abdus) as well as one female lover (Mohja).³⁷ She had the following two verses embroidered in gold thread on her coat: "By God, I am fit for greatness, and stride along with great pride" and "I allow my lover to reach my cheek, and I grant my kiss to him who craves it."³⁸ Although Wallada uses here nouns and pronouns that are grammatically masculine ("my lover" and "to him") and although these have been read as referring to her active (heterosexual) love life, I would like to propose that the use of the masculine may simply be part of the literary conventions of the time and that her verses therefore need not be read exclusively as heterosexual ones. After all, addressing the female beloved as male was part and parcel of the Arabic literary tradition. Wallada's famous embroidered lines, if not specifically or exclusively lesbian, can no longer be read as exclusively heterosexual either and may be more fruitfully considered lesbian-like. Her lifestyle, which was part and parcel of the development of the *zarf* tradition in medieval al-Andalus, makes Wallada one among the multiple aristocratic *mutazarrifat* of the Islamicate world. Evidently, in the medieval Islamicate world courtliness and courtly love were not exclusively heterosexual practices.

³⁷ There is a heated debate among scholars as to whether Wallada may be considered a lesbian in the medieval Islamicate world. Philip K. Hitti has called her "the Sappho of Spain" (*History of the Arabs from the Earliest Times to the Present*, 9th ed. [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968]). This view was repeated by Abu Khalil ("A Note on the Study of Homosexuality in the Arab/Islamic Civilization," *Arab Studies Journal* 1–2 [Fall 1993]: 34) and by Murray and Roscoe (*Islamic Homosexualities*, 99). However, Rowson takes the opposite view, stating that there is insufficient evidence for making any assertions about her lesbianism. Rowson has summarized the debate in his forthcoming book on male homoeroticism in the medieval Islamicate tradition. I would like to thank him for sharing parts of his unpublished manuscript with me.

³⁸ Devin J. Stewart, "Ibn Zaydun," in *The Literature of al-Andalus*, ed. Maria Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, and Michael Anthony Sells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 308. On Wallada see Antonio Arjona Castro, *La sexualidad en la España musulmana* (Córdoba: Universidad de Córdoba, 1985), 25. Arabic sources on Wallada include Abu al-Hasan `Ali ibn Bassam al-Shantarini (d. 1147), *Dhakhirah fi mahasin ahl al-Jazirah*, ed. Ihsan `Abbas, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 2000), 332–35; Abul-`Abbas A. Maqqari (d. 1632), *Nafh al-tib min ghusn al-Andalus al-ratib*, ed. Ihsan `Abbas, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1968), 205–11; and `Umar Rida Kahhalah, *A `lam al-nisa' fi `alamay al-`Arab wa-al-Islam*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Mu`assasat al-Risalah, 1977), 287–90. Another illustrious and possibly lesbian-like poetess of medieval al-Andalus is Hafsa Bint al-Hajj (ca. 1135–90); see Wiebke Walther, *Women in Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: M. Weiner, 1993), 144–48.

Most of what we know about medieval women and the practice of *zarf* concerns not aristocratic women like Wallada but rather slave girls (*jawari*) and especially singing slave girls (*qaynas*). Slave singers, despite or rather *because of* their social status as slaves, played a significant role in the medieval Islamic world not only because they were freer to express themselves (in contrast to freeborn women, who were veiled and kept outside the public sphere) but also because of their superior intellectual skills and extraordinary beauty. Freed slaves could sometimes achieve lucrative careers; some in fact rose to the top levels of society, marrying caliphs and other rulers.

The tradition of *jawari* and of *qaynas* in particular may be considered as yet another significant sociocultural space in which Arab lesbians may have thrived and Arab lesbian-like intimate attachments may have flourished. Some of the most successful singing slave girls left traces in the historical records of the period. A few were prominent poets of the Abbasid period in Basra (in modern Iraq) and considered the most trustworthy transmitters of the oral repertoire as well as the most accomplished performers and entertainers. Occasionally, they even had their own singing schools and owned slaves themselves.³⁹ The best known of these slave girls remain undoubtedly `Inan (d. 841), Fadl (d. 875), and `Arib (d. 890), all of whom were cited by Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani (897–972), the tenth-century Abbasid historian, poet, and musicologist, in his *Kitab al-aghani* (Book of Songs).⁴⁰ Although none of these three famous *qaynas* was explicitly referred to as lesbian (*sahiqqa*) in the surviving sources, they were labeled *mutazarrifat*, that very term for elegant courtly ladies who practiced *zarf* and who sometimes displayed lesbian-like characteristics. Additional research into the lives and production of *qaynas* could reveal the extent to which their erotic practices and the verses they left behind reflect not only heterosexual relations but also same-sex attachments. If so, *qaynas*, like the cross-dressed heroines from *A Thousand and One Nights* or Amazon warriors from Arab epics, could be some of the forgotten representatives of lesbian or lesbian-like desire in the medieval Islamic world.

³⁹ Suzanne Meyers Sawa, "The Role of Women in Musical Life: The Medieval Arabo-Islamic Courts," *Canadian Women's Studies: Les cahiers de la femme* 8 (1987): 94. Much information about the education of *qaynas* can be learned from the ninth-century writer al-Jahiz's *Risalat al-qiyan*, which survives only in one manuscript, Istanbul MS Damad 949, fols. 177v–188v. The Arabic text has been edited and translated into English by A. F. L. Beeston as *The Epistle on Singing-Girls of Jahiz* (Warminster, U.K.: Aris & Phillips, 1980), and into French by Charles Pellat as "Les esclaves-chanteuses de Gahiz," *Arabica* 10 (1963): 121–47, esp. 145 on *qaynas*.

⁴⁰ On the *Kitab al-aghani* see Hilary Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs: Compilation and the Author's Craft in Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani's "Kitab al-Aghani"* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and Ignazio Guidi, *Tables alphabétiques du "Kitab al-Aghani"* (Leiden: Brill, 1900). Information about *qaynas* is also found in histories of Muslim women written in the Middle Ages such as Ibn al-Sa'i (1196–1275), *Nisa' al-khulafa'* (Women of the Caliphs), ed. Mustafa Jawad (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1968). While al-Sa'i discussed primarily aristocratic women, Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (1445–1505) treated slave girls from all sections of society in his discussion of *zarf* in *al-Mustazraf min akhbar al-jawari*.

LESBIANISM IN THE MEDIEVAL ISLAMICATE TRADITION:
MODERN IMPLICATIONS

Perhaps not surprisingly and given the sociopolitical climate in the Islamicate world today, a significant number of primary sources, whether composed in Arabic, Persian, or Turkish, that have survived documenting medieval same-sex practices between women or lesbian-like attachments are today silenced or censored. Most of the medieval erotic treatises remain unedited, unpublished, and difficult to obtain not only in manuscript form but also in libraries and bookstores across the Arab world. Indeed, very few of them have been examined by scholars either within or outside the Islamicate world. One of the main challenges of my research into medieval Arab lesbianism has been precisely that of locating and obtaining copies of relevant material. Understanding these difficulties and appreciating who is permitted to have access to Arabic materials on alternative sexuality provide a glimpse of the potential for political and social subversion that these documents undeniably possess.

I would like to give one example of the current state of the earliest erotic treatise in Arabic, the *Jawami` al-ladhdha*, or *Encyclopedia of Pleasure*. I became aware of the existence of an Arabic edition of this text in 2003 (it was published in 2002) but acquired it only through the intercession of a male Arab friend who was able to buy the book in secret at a bookshop in Cairo. When I had tried to buy the book myself one summer earlier, the owner of the largest (and supposedly most liberal) bookstore in Egypt told me that although he had copies of the text in his back room, he could not sell it to, in his words, "a proper Muslim woman such as yourself." At the same time that I discovered the existence of this Arabic edition of the *Encyclopedia of Pleasure*, I found out that it was published as part of a series entitled *Adab al-jins `inda al-Arab* (The Erotic Writings of the Arabs), which to date includes half a dozen titles on Arabic eroticism published in Damascus, Syria, by a press called the Arabic Book Press (Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi). Still today, several years after the press's first publication (2002), many of these Arabic erotic treatises are more widely available in specialized bookstores in the West, such as London and Paris, than in the Arab world.

The initial moment of celebration at acquiring the Arabic edition of the *Encyclopedia of Pleasure* was quickly tempered when I actually examined the Arabic text. The name of the press had been carefully blacked out, as was the date of publication. The entire book was printed in black ink on white paper, and prints of large trees in red ink had been superimposed over the text. Most likely this design represented a cheap attempt at avoiding censorship by making quick identification of the book's subject matter difficult, but it also made the reading of the entire book quite challenging. The superimposition of image over text and of red over black ink over white paper literalized for me the multiple layers of veils that had

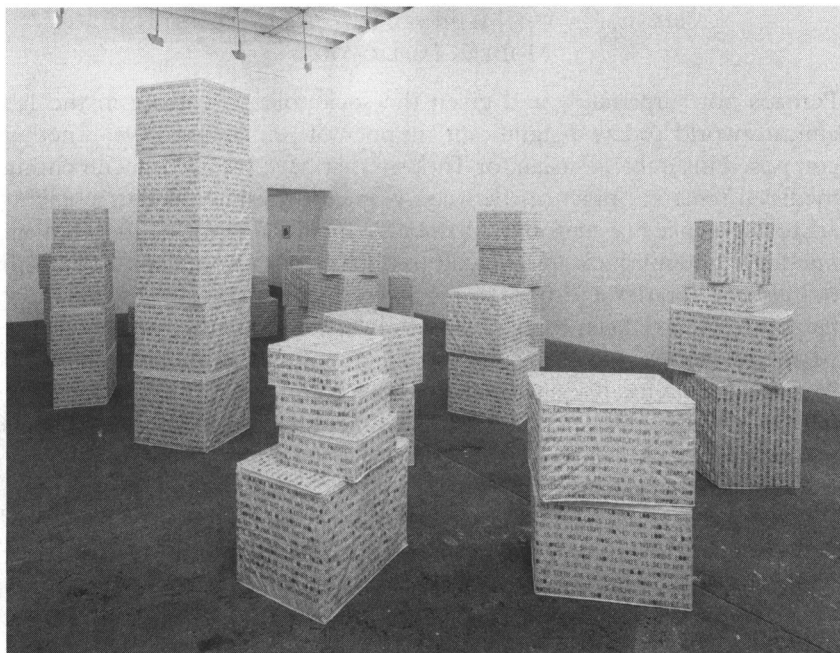


Figure 1: *The Encyclopedia of Pleasure*, 2001. Embroidered Sculpture, installation view at Deitch Projects. © Ghada Amer. Courtesy Deitch Projects, New York.

covered the Arabic erotic text over time. In addition, the Arabic edition remained incomplete at best, most likely because it was based on a single, unidentified, and probably extremely defective manuscript. Several of the chapters found in the English translation, particularly those dealing with same-sex relations, had been left out of the Arabic edition. Still today, the *Encyclopedia of Pleasure* remains known primarily through an English translation, a 1977 Canadian PhD dissertation by Salah Addin Khawwam, translated by Adnan Jarkas and Salah Addin Khawwam and published by Aleppo Publishing in Toronto. The existence of this published translation should not deceive us into thinking that this text is readily available even in English. Quite the opposite: Aleppo Publishing has since gone out of business; none of the translators is to be found in any scholarly listings or directories; no information is given on the university where the dissertation was submitted and defended; the book is utterly unavailable for purchase anywhere; and it can only be consulted through two known copies, one at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., and the other at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

In 2001 the Egyptian artist Ghada Amer (who is my sister) created a sculpture inspired from the medieval Arabic text and entitled it *The Encyclopedia of Pleasure* (Fig. 1). This sculpture is the first and only work

in any media, as far as I know, devoted exclusively to this groundbreaking Arabic text. Her sculpture is an unprecedented and perhaps subversive gesture by an Arab woman to save from oblivion this essential text and, in broader terms, to break the silence imposed upon female eroticism in the Arab world and to resurrect a frank and nonjudgmental discussion around women's sexuality that until today continues to be absent in the East.⁴¹

Yet the difficulty of obtaining access to medieval Arabic writings on alternative sexualities should not be understood to be a problem specific to the Arab world; it manifests itself also in the West, though under a different guise. To give but one example, the only English translation of al-Tifashi's *Nuzhat al-albab* is called *The Delight of Hearts* and was translated by Edward A. Lacey from a French translation by René Khawam rather than from the Arabic original. The translation has ended up ghettoizing this important Arabic text. Even though it is almost certain that this medieval Arabic work was addressed to a much wider audience, its contemporary English translation is published by an exclusively male gay press called the Gay Sunshine Press and thus has a limited circulation and is likely to be known primarily to a gay audience. Moreover, Lacey has taken the liberty to excise from his work the chapter on lesbianism as well as other sections dealing with heterosexuality because of budgetary concerns and press policy, which dictates that Gay Sunshine Press address exclusively male gay literature.⁴² The manipulations that *Nuzhat al-albab* has thus undergone have transformed this important text almost beyond recognition. Not only has this English translation utterly erased those lesbian voices that were audible in the medieval Arabic tradition, but it has also categorized sexuality in ways that were certainly not present in the medieval text. Translating only the sections on gay men's sexuality has imposed a modern and Western perspective onto the medieval Arabic work that places sexual desires and behaviors much more on a continuum.⁴³

⁴¹ See Sahar Amer and Olu Oguibe, eds., *Ghada Amer* (Amsterdam: De Appel, 2002), and Sahar Amer, "The *Encyclopedia of Pleasure* and the Politics of Eroticism," *Xavier Review* 27, no. 1 (2007), special issue, "Sex and the Spirit," ed. Keith Mitchell and Robin Vander, 53–66.

⁴² Lacey, introduction to *The Delight of Hearts*, 8.

⁴³ A similar approach characterizes French translations by René R. Khawam, who omits certain sections of the medieval manuscript that he considers to be of lesser stylistic value; see, for example, his introduction to his translation of al-Hawrani entitled *Les ruses des femmes* (Paris: Phébus, 1994), 14. Some modern French translations of medieval Arabic literary anthologies and erotic writings contribute to another set of problems. Even though they claim their work is based on "original Arab manuscripts," the translators seldom provide basic critical information, such as the manuscript used or the name of the library holding the manuscript, as with René Khawam's translation of al-Tifashi entitled *Les délices de coeurs*, or his translation of al-Souyouti entitled *Nuits de nocces ou comment humer le doux breuvage de la magie licite* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1972), and also his translation of Ali al-Baghdadi entitled *Les fleurs éclatantes dans les baisers et l'accolement* (Paris: A. Michel, 1973).

There is no denying the extraordinary wealth of material documenting same-sex love and desire between women in the medieval Islamicate world. The medieval Arabic tradition of eroticism is particularly noteworthy because it is far more progressive than is commonly imagined, given the current reappropriation of Islam by fundamentalist political regimes. It brings to light a much richer understanding of sexualities than is imagined to be possible in lands with a majority Muslim population. The texts that have survived are especially valuable because they paint medieval Arab and Muslim women with unexpected agency over their social and sexual lives and have thus the potential to become powerful models of resistance for contemporary Arab and Muslim women. Recovering the evidence of lesbianism and of lesbian-like attachments in the medieval Arabic tradition speaks thus to the emancipatory possibilities of the history of sexuality. Moreover, the medieval Arabic practices of homosexuality and lesbianism also challenge contemporary Western and Eastern (Arabic) assumptions about gender and, in particular, the binary constructions of masculinity and femininity. It is thus significant for the cross-cultural history of sexuality and holds great promise in redressing what Bennett has termed “the heterosexist bias of history.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Bennett, ““Lesbian-Like,”” 4.



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SERVANTS AT THE GATE: EUNUCHS AT THE COURT OF AL-MUQTADIR

BY

NADIA MARIA EL-CHEIKH*

Abstract

This paper investigates the eunuch's institution in the court of the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir and seeks, first, to delineate the variety of functions that the eunuchs held in the early fourth/tenth century Abbasid court both in the harem and in ceremonial; second, it investigates the careers of the eunuchs Šāfi al-Ḥurāmī and Muflīḥ al-Khādim al-Aswad, exploring their sources of authority and their various networks which allowed them to exercise a high degree of political influence.

Le but de ce travail est d'étudier l'institution "Eunuque" au cœur de la cour Abbasside du calife al-Muqtadir. En premier lieu nous soulignons les fonctions multiples que les eunuques performaient dans la cour abbasside (début 4/10^{ème} siècle) tant au sein du harem pendant le cérémonial royal. En second lieu nous explorons plus en détail les carrières des eunuques Šāfi al-Ḥurāmī et Muflīḥ al-Khādim al-Aswad, identifiant les sources de leur pouvoir et les réseaux différents qui leur permirent d'exercer une véritable influence politique.

Keywords: eunuchs, court, al-Muqtadir, harem, ceremonial

INTRODUCTION

In his recent comprehensive work on eunuchs in Islam, David Ayalon tried to show "how the eunuch institution functioned in fact." He acknowledges that his study can "at best be considered as a skeleton with many bones missing, and others only partly restored."¹ This paper seeks to restore more bone to the skeleton by investigating eunuchs in the early fourth/tenth century, focusing on the nature of their presence and the extent of their power in the court of the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir (295-320/908-932).

The death of the Abbasid caliph al-Muktafi in 295/908 led to a period of crisis especially since he had made no provisions for the succession. It was Ja'far

* Nadia Maria El-Cheikh, Department of History and Archaeology, American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon, nmcheikh@aub.edu.lb

¹ David Ayalon, *Eunuchs, Caliphs and Sultans: A Study in Power Relationships* (Jerusalem: the Magnes Press, 1999), 4-5.

[al-Muqtadir], the thirteen year-old brother of al-Muktafi, who was proclaimed caliph despite objections raised on account of his age. His caliphate, a period of unstable government, started out with the appointment of a sort of regency council composed of his mother Shaghab, his maternal uncle Gharīb, Mu'nīs the treasurer, Mu'nīs al-Muzaffar, leader of the Baghdad forces, Šāfi the chief of Eunuchs and the chamberlain Sawzan. This situation allowed members of the administration, servants in the palace, viziers and relatives of the caliph to negotiate the realities of political power among themselves. It was the power struggle between these various factions that allowed the court retinue, including a number of eunuchs, significant involvement in palace and government matters.

This paper investigates the eunuch's institution in the court of the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir and seeks, first, to delineate the variety of functions that the eunuchs held in the early fourth/tenth century-Abbasid court both in the harem and in ceremonial; second, it investigates the careers of the eunuchs Šāfi al-Ḥuramī and Muflīḥ al-Khādim al-Aswad. The narratives pertaining to the reign of al-Muqtadir are particularly rich for such an investigation because the intrigues at the court found their way to the historical annals and other literary texts that refer to this period.

By studying the roles, the position and the power attained by eunuchs, this investigation will be contributing to our knowledge of the functioning of particular court institutions in the early fourth/tenth century. The court enclosed the caliph by limiting access to him to a select and favored entourage. Everything to and from the caliph had to pass through the filter of the court before it could reach him. The caliph could exert influence only through the mediation of the people closest to him. Ultimately, access to the caliph was what mattered. What were the rewards of access? How influential were the personal courtiers? What part did they play in the factional struggles to place men and dictate politics? An investigation of the eunuchs at the court of al-Muqtadir can help in answering these questions, showing the extent of their influence, the significant political role that they managed to play and the wealth that they managed to accumulate.

THE HAREM

One of the major factors that shaped the eunuch institution in Islam was the harem. *Ḥarīm* is "a term applied to those parts of the house to which access is forbidden, and hence more particularly to the women's quarters."² The private

² Shaun Marmon, *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 6.

quarters in a domestic residence and by extension its female residents are referred to as a "harem." It was the Muslim women's unique seclusion which made the employment of eunuchs inevitable. Accepted as a functionally legitimate group, this distinctive gender group flourished in spite of the fact that Islamic law prohibited the making of eunuchs within the lands of Islam.³

The Abbasid harem had a highly articulated structure. It consisted of family members and of an administrative/service hierarchy. The former included the queen mother, the wives of the caliph, his concubines, the children, the unmarried, widowed or divorced sisters and aunts. The administrative hierarchy included the high-ranking administrative officers of the harem, the female servants who performed the housekeeping tasks of the harem, female slaves, who might be the personal property of the women, and the eunuchs. Thus, a diverse community, numbering in the thousands, populated the harems of the Abbasid caliphs. Caring for them and guarding them required large numbers of slaves and eunuchs. Eunuchs played an important role as servants and guardians within the caliph's women's quarters. The large number of eunuchs at the court of al-Muqtadir is signaled in a number of sources. Hilāl al-Ṣābi' states that:

It is generally believed that in the days of al-Muqtadir bi-allāh . . . the residence contained 11,000 eunuchs (*khādim*)—7,000 blacks and 4,000 white Slavs—4,000 free and slave girls and thousands of chamber servants.⁴

The large number of eunuchs and the disproportion in the figures, indicating that there were perhaps as many as three eunuchs per woman has been explained by an important consideration, namely, the need to keep an eye on women for twenty-four hours a day which implied the existence of shifts. Moreover, the duties of the eunuchs embraced the whole compound of the court and not only the harem since the eunuchs formed a prominent element in the court's audiences and parades.⁵ In any event, the great number of eunuchs meant that they could form a pressure group at court.

A glimpse at the presence of eunuchs in the harem is provided by a rare description of the interior of the palace of al-Muqtadir in the fourth/tenth century-*adab* work, *al-Faraj ba'da al-shidda*. A young cloth merchant was sneaked inside al-Muqtadir's palace for an interview with the caliph's mother, one of whose *qahramānas*, stewardesses, he wished to marry. The merchant was concealed

³ See Cristina de la Puente, "Sin linaje, sin alcurnia, sin hogar: eunucos en el Andalus en época Omeya," in *Identidades Marginales* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2003), 147-193.

⁴ Hilāl al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm dār al-khilāfa*, ed. Mikhā'il 'Awwād (Baghdad: Maṭba'at al-ʿĀnī, 1964), 8.

⁵ Ayalon, *Eunuchs, Caliphs and Sultans*, 16-17.

inside a box and shipped inside the palace along with other boxes in which the *qahramāna* pretended to be bringing clothes and other effects to al-Muqtadir's mother. The *qahramāna* had to pass through groups of eunuchs in charge of the doors of the various apartments in the harem; they all demanded to inspect the boxes. She yelled at some and cajoled others until she reached the chief eunuch who insisted on inspecting the content of the boxes. A dialogue ensued with the chief eunuch whom the *qahramāna* addressed as *ustādh* and, once again, her cunning saved her and she managed to pass through.⁶ This report contains information about the harem section of the palace, the hallways and gateways, all supervised by the eunuch guardians. Eunuchs were, thus, in the heart of the harem monitoring access and partaking in all the informal politics that took place in it.

The eunuch servants are referred to in the sources as *khādim*. David Ayalon proved that in the writings of al-Jāhiz, the term *khādim* was synonymous to eunuch.⁷ Eunuch servants were permitted to move freely in all parts of the building or complex. Their duties embraced the whole compound of the court, serving as intermediaries between their master and their wives, concubines and female relatives. These circumstances gave eunuchs direct access to the person of the ruler whose living quarters were connected to the harem by an exclusive entrance used only by women and eunuchs.⁸ Access to women gave eunuchs opportunities to influence men in high positions by means of their feminine connections within the harem. This connection was particularly important during the reign of al-Muqtadir since his mother Shaghab figures prominently in the annals of this period through her political advice to her son, her financial contributions to the reign and her wide-ranging philanthropic activities.⁹

⁶ Al-Tanūkhī, *Kitāb al-faraj ba'da al-shidda*, ed. 'Abbūd al-Shalji (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1978), 4: 362-368. On this anecdote, see Muhsin Mahdi, "From History to Fiction: The Tale Told by the King's Steward in the Thousand and One Night," in *The Thousand and One Night in Arabic Literature and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 78-105 and Michael Cooperson, "Baghdad in Rhetoric and Narrative," *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 99-113. One designation for eunuchs is *ustādh* in the sense of teacher, educator, upbringer because some eunuchs educated the youngsters.

⁷ David Ayalon, "On the term *Khādim* in the Sense of Eunuch in the Early Islamic Sources," *Arabica* 32 (1985): 289-308. He was responding to A. Cheikh Mousa's "Gāhiz et les eunuques ou la confusion du même et de l'autre," *Arabica* 29 (1982): 184-214.

⁸ David Ayalon, "On the Eunuchs in Islam," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 1 (1979): 67-124; reprinted in *Outsiders in the Lands of Islam: Mamluks, Mongols and Eunuchs* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1988).

⁹ Nadia Maria El Cheikh, "Gender and Politics: The Harem of al-Muqtadir," in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900*, eds. L. Brubaker and Julia Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 147-161.

This freedom of movement permitted a number of eunuchs to participate in the political life of the state. Indeed, eunuchs acquired roles far beyond their basic functions as guardians of the harem as they managed to infiltrate posts and positions of vital importance. While in the Byzantine empire, certain functions at the court were especially reserved for eunuchs,¹⁰ such well defined functions do not seem to have existed in the Abbasid caliphate, where there seems to have been no distinction between eunuchs serving the harem and eunuchs fulfilling administrative and military duties. The same eunuchs could have connections and influence in both camps.¹¹

During the caliphate of al-Muqtadir, eunuchs became trusted political advisers and powerful administrators. Court eunuchs also appeared in important positions in the army and police. Their success has to be explained with reference to their distinctive gender and to the fact that they were cut off from their original environment with no family or tribe, a situation that made them safer, dependent and loyal. In the words of D. Ayalon, "the formidable combination of the eunuch's exclusive free access to the person of the patron in his private quarters on the one hand, and the fact that there was little to divert the eunuch from devotedly serving his patron, on the other, created between the two relations of loyalty and trust, which were unique in their strength and intensity."¹² Existing outside of the dominant social values and institutions of family, offspring and procreation, eunuchs were ideally suited to serve as servants, agents and proxies for their masters. An important part of their gender construct was grounded on their perceived loyalty and trustworthiness.¹³ In a recent study on eunuchs in al-Andalus, Cristina de la Puente underlined this aspect, emphasizing the loyalty of these servants who were assigned with delicate missions, functioning as messengers and as spies and informants in the Umayyad court of al-Andalus. Moreover, she posited that eunuchs may have allowed themselves to transgress the limits of social conventions not only because of their proximity

¹⁰ Rodolphe Guiland listed ten such duties, the highest being that of the *Parakoimomenos* who slept in the bed chamber of the emperor to ensure the latter's safety. In "Fonctions et dignités des eunuques," *Etudes byzantines* 2 (1944): 185-225 and 3 (1945): 179-214.

¹¹ Ayalon, "On the Eunuchs in Islam," and *Eunuchs, Caliphs and Sultans*, 197. In the later Mamluk period eunuchs seem to have served in more specific capacities in the citadel: the eunuchs of the portals, the eunuchs of the Gate of the Veil, the eunuchs of the barracks, eunuchs cup-bearers, eunuchs of the royal wardrobe, eunuchs of the royal treasury, the eunuch *zimāmdār* who supervised the sultan's intimate family and other eunuchs with various duties. See Marmon, *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries*, 5.

¹² Ayalon, "On the Eunuchs in Islam."

¹³ Kathryn M. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 5, 85.

to powerful people, but because their own mutilation made them comparable to figures who were patiently tolerated, namely the buffoons, the drunkards, and the insane.¹⁴

THE CALIPH'S SECLUSION AND CEREMONIAL

By the early fourth/tenth century, caliphs were surrounding themselves with the most impenetrable barriers to their presence. The ritual of the caliph's audience had, indeed, become elaborate. Forms of visual and aural display, including specific manners and colors of dress, a particular etiquette, specific spatial and temporal disposition of bodies, all were deployed in the enunciation of royal power. They served to dramatize the locus of power and to amplify absolutism.¹⁵ The sources have left us a description of the reception granted to the Byzantine ambassadors who visited al-Muqtadir in 305/917. Before being introduced to the presence of the caliph who received them in the palace of al-Tāj, the envoys were shown over the various buildings within the precincts, and these are said to have numbered twenty-three separate palaces. They were taken to the palace known as Khān al-Khayl and proceeded next to the New Kiosk, to Dār al-Shajarah, to Qaşr al-Firdaws and on and on until they were finally brought before al-Muqtadir in the palace of al-Tāj. Miskawayh has the following description of the Tāj proper:

When they reached the Palace they were taken into a corridor which led into one of the quadrangles, then they turned into another corridor which led to a quadrangle wider than the first, and the chamberlains kept conducting them through corridors and quadrangles until they were weary with tramping and bewildered. These corridors and quadrangles were all crowded with *ghulmān* and *khadam*. Finally they approached the *majlis* in which al-Muqtadir was to be found.¹⁶

This account points clearly to the massive effort made to create an environment which would overwhelm the visitor. The visitors were confused by its complexity and astounded by its magnificence. Distance from the caliph was expressed in the distances traversed before entry to the palace gate itself and in temporal terms with periods of extended sequestration and waiting.¹⁷ The description

¹⁴ De la Puente, "Sin linaje, sin alcurnia, sin hogar . . ."

¹⁵ Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Politics* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), 131.

¹⁶ Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam*, ed. H. F. Amedroz (Oxford: Blackwell, 1920), 1: 55; trans. by D. S. Margoliouth, *The Eclipse of the 'Abbasid Caliphate* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1921), 1: 59. Account in al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād* (Beirut: Dār al-Maṭba'a al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.) 1: 101-105.

¹⁷ Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 146.

reveals the highly complex subdivision of spaces consisting of increasingly secluded courts in which authority and inaccessibility increased the more deeply one penetrated into the heart of the palace. This highly official ceremony underscores the notion of princely isolation and separateness. The passage from one court to another served to establish a narrative which culminated in the audience with the caliph himself.¹⁸

Eunuchs played a crucial role in these ceremonials. The internal spaces of the caliphal palace were filled with eunuchs. In his description of this reception, Hilāl al-Šābi', like Miskawayh, mentions that the Byzantine visitors passed through courtyards and corridors in the palace which were filled with guards, servants and eunuchs.¹⁹ Al-Šābi' also mentions that during formal receptions the eunuchs stand behind the caliph's throne.²⁰ We know from Fatimid ceremonial that the caliph's eunuchs were closely associated with him and that they had as much stake in the observance of these ceremonies as the caliph himself. Although these remarks concern Fatimid ceremonial, the protocol of the Fatimid court was, according to Paula Sanders, much like that of contemporary dynasties, especially, that of the Abbasid caliphs.²¹ The eunuchs regulated court ceremonial and controlled a complex structure of spatial sanctity that by the fourth/tenth century had come to surround the Abbasid caliph.

The whole aspect of caliphal appearance bespoke distance. Abbasid caliphs from the Samarrā' period onwards almost never appeared in public. The sight of the caliph had become an exceptionally rare and controlled event. Al-Muqtadir rarely left the palace. He did not lead military campaigns, did not lead public prayers, did not attend important funerals, did not preside over the *mazālim* court.²² His public appearances were so rare that the sources record them. By keeping to himself the caliph gained in prestige but lost in contacts with his subjects.

One major consequence of the caliphs' remoteness was that potential power lay in the hands of those who were intermediaries, formal or informal, between them and those who governed in their name on the outside. The chief cham-

¹⁸ Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 164; Marcus Milwright, "Fixtures and Fittings. The Role of Decoration in Abbasid Palace Design," in *A Medieval Islamic City Reconsidered: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Samarra'*, ed. Chase Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 79-109.

¹⁹ Al-Šābi', *Rusūm*, 12.

²⁰ Al-Šābi', *Rusūm*, 91.

²¹ Paula Sanders, *Ritual, Politics and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 15-37.

²² David Bruce Jay Marmer, *The Political Culture of the Abbasid Court, 279-324 (A. H.)*, Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University, 1994, 70-1.

berlain and the leading eunuch seem to have had joint control over the space inside the palace, and were the human barriers between the outside world and the caliph.²³ The seclusion of the Abbasid caliphs, thus, opened the door to the unwarranted influence of the eunuchs. Eunuchs met a distinct need, the need of the absolutely isolated caliph for information and human contact.²⁴ Serving the caliph, they would not only act as liaisons between him and his subjects but would also gather for him vital information. From being a mere channel of information, and through the exploitation of informal influence, eunuchs expanded their powers.

The fact that the palace complex functioned simultaneously as a stage set for the representation of caliphal power, as the administrative center of a vast empire, and as a residence for the caliphal family had important implications. First, since government was conducted near the caliph's residence, access to the center of government was highly restricted. As a result, access became power, and the space within the palace that divided residence from government was a center for competition and intrigue. Eunuchs and chamberlains controlled this space. Moreover, distances, both physical and metaphorical, meant that people often communicated by letter or through verbal messages transmitted by proxies. The messengers were usually eunuchs because they could enter any gendered space forbidden to other men.²⁵

ŞĀFĪ AL-ḤURAMĪ AND AL-MUQTADIR'S EARLY YEARS

The Abbasid court contained a large matrix of relations, political and economic, religious and cultural, that converged in the caliph's residence. For the general subject the caliph was in practice not easy of access. He was always surrounded by those 'known at court.'²⁶ Proximity had real advantages. Those 'known at court' had the privilege of presenting petitions to the caliph, for introducing someone to the caliph or to an influential personality at the court. The personal attendants were feared as men close to the caliph, men who could exercise profound influence over him. They deployed the power of intimacy or the politics of intimacy on the public stage at the same time as the caliph found himself enmeshed in specific networks of interdependence.

²³ Marmer, *The Political Culture*, 184.

²⁴ Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 186-7.

²⁵ Marmer, *The Political Culture*, 15-16.

²⁶ Ragnhild Hatton, "Louis XIV: At the Court of the Sun King," *The Courts of Europe: Politics, Patronage and Royalty, 1400-1800*, ed. A. G. Dickens (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 233-261.

The eunuch Ṣāfi al-Ḥuramī²⁷ played a consequential role at court, during the reigns of three consecutive caliphs. Ṣāfi reports an anecdote in which he appears inside the harem alongside the caliph al-Muʿtaḍid (279-289/892-902): Walking with Ṣāfi through the women's quarters to the apartments of his concubine Shaghab, the caliph spied through the curtains on his five year old son Jaʿfar. Displeased with the way Jaʿfar was sharing his grapes with his friends, al-Muʿtaḍid sadly predicted that Jaʿfar [al-Muqtadir] would squander his fortune.²⁸ Ṣāfi was also near al Muʿtaḍid on his deathbed. Al-Ṭabarī reports that as he could no longer speak, al-Muʿtaḍid communicated with Ṣāfi, through signs and gestures.²⁹

Ṣāfi is also seen by the deathbed of the succeeding caliph al-Muktafi, who in Dhū al-Qiʿda 295/September 908, succumbed at the age of 32 to a sickness and became immobile. Starting with the month of Shaʿbān, the caliph had started losing his mind, and Ṣāfi gave his personal seal to the vizier. During a temporary recovery, Ṣāfi informed the caliph that two Abbasid princes seem to be mobilizing support, prompting the caliph to ensure the succession of the young Jaʿfar [al-Muqtadir].³⁰ Ṣāfi had influence because of his proximity to the dying caliph who would have been in his private chambers. Ṣāfi's prominence resulted specifically from his status as a eunuch, in other words, from his gender which gave him the privilege of accompanying the caliph into the harem.

When al-Muktafi died in 295/908, the vizier ʿAbbās appointed the young Jaʿfar [al-Muqtadir] to the caliphate. Fearing the people's probable objection to al-Muqtadir on account of his youth, it was Ṣāfi al-Ḥuramī who was entrusted with the delicate task of escorting the young Jaʿfar secretly to the palace, a testimony to his perceived loyalty and trustworthiness. The sources relate that Ṣāfi went to bring him down the river from Ibn Tāhir's palace; when the riverboat in which he was brought came on its way to the palace of the vizier Abbās,

²⁷ Certain eunuchs carried the titled *al-ḥuramī*. i.e., a person who is connected with the harem. According to David Ayalon, it is not clear why certain eunuchs were so called, whereas most of them were not, for very many of them did serve in the harem. See his "On the Eunuchs in Islam." Harlod Bowen takes *al-ḥuramī* to mean Chief Eunuch and Keeper of the Harem. In *The life and Times of ʿAlī ibn ʿIsa 'the Good Vizier'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), 88.

²⁸ Al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-muhādara wa akhbār al-mudhākara*, ed. ʿAbbūd al-Shalji (Beirut: no publisher, 1971), 1: 287-90.

²⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk*, ed. M. J. De Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1879-1901), Tertia Series, 4: 2208.

³⁰ ʿArib, *Ṣilat tārikh al-Ṭabarī*, ed. M. J. De Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1897), 19-21. Ayalon has pointed to the close link between the eunuchs and the caliphal insignia emphasizing that eunuchs were entrusted with guarding the most precious caliphal symbols, *Eunuchs, Caliphs and Sultans*, 101-2.

Ḥasan, the retainer of Abbās, called out to the boatmen to come inside. It occurred to Ṣāfi that ‘Abbās only desired Ja‘far to enter his palace because he had changed his mind with regard to the prince. Fearing that the vizier might transfer his choice to someone else, Ṣāfi ordered the boatmen to proceed to the caliph’s palace without stopping.³¹ Ṣāfi was, thus, instrumental in preventing Ja‘far’s potential arrest. ‘Arib states that Ṣāfi’s action “was reckoned to be [a reflection of] his determination and insight.”³² Ṣāfi was, moreover, responsible for getting the *bay‘a*, the oath of allegiance, to the young caliph. Objection to Ja‘far’s succession on account of his age incited Ṣāfi to rapidly sneak Ja‘far into the palace to get him the *bay‘a* promptly.

Al-Muqtadir’s caliphate began, as stated earlier, with the appointment of a sort of regency council that included Ṣāfi al-Ḥuramī. Thus, his role in ensuring the succession to al-Muqtadir provided him with significant power since Ṣāfi was now in a position to influence policies at the highest echelons. He reappears in the sources at an important juncture for al-Muqtadir. Very shortly after his accession, in 296/908, al-Muqtadir was deposed in favor of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. The military leaders, the administrators, and the people all pledged allegiance to Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. The *khawāṣṣ* of al-Muqtadir are singled out among those who refused to partake in this conspiracy.³³ Men like Ṣāfi al-Ḥuramī confronted an attempt which, if successful, would have left them with no link to the caliphate. Thus, they defended al-Muqtadir essentially to maintain their own position of power. These men were personally bound to al-Muqtadir and were dependent upon him. The caliph, in turn, expected from his protégés (*muṣṭana‘*) a lifelong commitment and loyalty in return for the benefits and favor that they received.³⁴

Eunuchs played a prominent role in the arrests that followed the failed conspiracy of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. The conspirators Ibn ‘Abdūn and ‘Alī b. ‘Isa were betrayed by their protector to the mob who handed them over to one of al-Muqtadir’s eunuchs who was passing by. Ibn al-Mu‘tazz himself was also betrayed by a eunuch of the household in which he had taken refuge. The sources relate that a serving man of Abū ‘Abdallāh b. al-Jaṣṣāṣ informed Ṣāfi that Ibn al-Mu‘tazz

³¹ Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 1: 3-4; *Eclipse*, 1: 2-3.

³² ‘Arib, *Ṣilat*, 22.

³³ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*, ed. C. J. Tornberg (Beirut: Dār Ṣāḍir, 1979), 8: 15. According to Roy Mottahedeh, sometimes the soldiers and secretaries were lumped together as a common interest group, and were called *khawāṣṣ*. *Khawāṣṣ* used to mean “those who were particularly associated with the ruler,” that is, the clerks and soldiers. In *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001), 115.

³⁴ Mottahedeh, *Loyalty*, 82-93.

was hiding in his master's house. Šāfi raided the residence of Ibn al-Jaššās, dragged Ibn al-Mu'tazz and conducted him to the Palace.³⁵ Šāfi's role as a trusted aide is repeatedly encountered in the sources, in particular, in sensitive and secretive missions. Such was the role he played when al-Muqtadir decided to rid himself of his chamberlain Sawsan whose power had become unmanageable. 'Arib relates that one day, when al-Muqtadir was entering the square together with Sawsan, Šāfi helped the caliph execute his plan by feigning sickness. Sawsan dismounted to assist him. At that moment, armed men assaulted Sawsan, took him away, and Sawsan died within a few days in custody.³⁶

The anecdotes in which Šāfi al-Ḥuramī appears serve to distinguish him as one of the courtiers intimately linked with the protection of the contested caliph. The fact that he had served two previous caliphs entrenched his position in the palace. It was his direct access to the person of the ruler, the opportunities available to him for informal persuasion, and the caliph's personal trust which allowed Šāfi to exercise political influence. The sources are more copious with regard to the black eunuch Muflīḥ, whose career represents more clearly the wide range of power and influence that eunuchs did attain at the court of al-Muqtadir.

THE BLACK EUNUCH MUFLIḤ

Numerous black eunuchs rose in the military and administrative hierarchy, some even reaching the highest posts. According to David Ayalon, in the major centers of Islamic power there was hardly a black occupying an important position who was not a eunuch.³⁷ In his discussion of the reign of al-Muqtadir, 'Arib states that in the year 311/923 "all affairs were in the hands of Muflīḥ, the black eunuch."³⁸ Muflīḥ played a decisive role in important appointments, notably, in the reappointment of Ibn al-Furāt as vizier for the third and last time in 311/923. It was his grudge against the vizier Ḥāmid that motivated Muflīḥ to further the cause of Ibn al-Furāt. The degree of animosity between Ḥāmid and

³⁵ Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 1: 6-8; and Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 8: 18.

³⁶ 'Arib, *Šilat*, 29-30.

³⁷ According to David Ayalon, the blacks' chances to rise were extremely meager unless they were castrated. In *Eunuchs, Caliphs and Sultans*, 35. Perhaps the most famous black eunuch in the fourth/tenth century was Kāfūr who managed to declare himself sole master of Egypt in 355/966. For al-Mutannabi's poetry on Kāfūr see Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy: Myth, Gender and Ceremony in the Classical Arabic Ode* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 210-237.

³⁸ 'Arib, *Šilat*, 111. It is to be noted that if the eunuch was black, the word black, *aswad* was added. See Cheikh Moussa, "Gāhiz et les eunuques."

Mufliḥ can be judged by an exchange of insults during which Ḥāmid retorted: "I have an idea of buying a hundred black slaves, naming them all Mufliḥ and presenting them to my retainers."³⁹

This episode is revealing of societal attitudes towards eunuchs. Ḥāmid's words reflected, perhaps, resentment of the eunuchs who placed themselves as a physical barrier between the bureaucrats and the caliph. Ḥāmid's remark was both racist and included anti-eunuch sentiments, targeting Mufliḥ's lowly origins and physical condition. Indeed, the physiological effects of castration were believed to affect changes in a eunuch's temperament and moral fiber. Eunuchs were often perceived to have feminine moral attributes to match their altered physical being. Al-Jāḥiẓ in the third/ninth century drew a typology of eunuchs that related to the cause of castration and the ethnic or cultural origin of the eunuch. The mutilation of the black Africans was the most complete. Al-Jāḥiẓ describes the metamorphosis of both body and character that such a subject undergoes as a result of this type of castration, *al-jibāb*. Their character, depicted in mostly negative terms, is comparable to that of women and children; they cry easily and are gluttonous, they like to play and are sexually obsessed; they like domestic work; they are avaricious, indiscreet, jealous and cruel. The appearance and behavior of eunuchs represented the antithesis of appropriate male behavior characterized by balance and harmony in body, mind and behavior. As a result, eunuchs, like women, were believed to be unable to control their desires for food, drink and physical pleasure.⁴⁰ The general attitude towards eunuchs is reported to us by al-Ṭabarī who mentions that in the year 284/897, the populace, whenever they saw a black eunuch would shout, *O 'aqīq*, a situation which made the eunuchs angry. When a eunuch of the caliph al-Mu'taḍid was mistreated by such a crowd, the caliph ordered one of his eunuchs to ride out and arrest anyone who would take such liberties with eunuchs.⁴¹

³⁹ Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 1: 87.

⁴⁰ Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Hayawān*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Hārūn (Cairo: al-Bābī, 1945), 1: 106-118. See A. Cheikh Moussa, "Jahiz et les eunuches . . ." Al-Jāḥiẓ's typology is similar to the hostile classical tradition which contributed a collection of stereotypes about eunuchs to later Byzantine authors. See Kathryn M. Ringrose "Passing the Test of Sanctity: Denial of Sexuality and Involuntary Castration," *Desire and Denial in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 123-137; and Steven M. Oberhelman, "Hierarchies of Gender, Ideology and Power in Ancient and Medieval Greek and Arabic Dream Literature," *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature*, eds. J. W. Wright Jr. and Everett Rowson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 55-93. This early perception by al-Jāḥiẓ continued into Mamluk times where al-Subkkī reiterates the lack of rational ability of eunuchs and their general similarity to women. See Marmon, *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries*, 61.

⁴¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk*, tertia series, 4: 2163-4. Franz Rosenthal states that he is unable to explain the significance of *'aqīq*. *The History of al-Ṭabarī: The Return of the Caliphate to Baghdad*, trans. and annotated by Franz Rosenthal (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 38: 45, footnote 232.

Mufliḥ's influence was closely related to his mediating role, carrying messages within the court, between the court and the caliph's private quarters, and between the court and the outside world. His role as an influential messenger is repeatedly stressed. During the circumstances surrounding the "passion" of the mystic al-Ḥallāj, the vizier Ḥāmid wrote a letter to al-Muqtadir requesting that the execution be authorized and implemented immediately. He sent the letter to Mufliḥ asking him to deliver it and to carry back the reply. The next morning the answer of al-Muqtadir reached him via Mufliḥ.⁴² Mufliḥ's role is underlined as the carrier of the letter but, more important, as the one who made sure to come back with an answer.

Al-Muḥassin, the son of Ibn al-Furāt, used the tension between Mufliḥ and Ḥāmid and communicated with Mufliḥ's secretary—a Christian eunuch who wielded great influence—"to whom he guaranteed office and fortune and honors" so that at last he made an arrangement between him and Mufliḥ. Al-Muḥassin then addressed a note to al-Muqtadir through Mufliḥ.⁴³ Mufliḥ, thus, surrounded himself with the trappings of authority, having a bureau with secretaries who handled his appointments and other affairs.

The indisputable power of Mufliḥ becomes even more conspicuous in the episode that followed the dismissal of Ḥāmid. Trying to have an audience with the Caliph, Ḥāmid came to the palace and met with Naṣr the chamberlain. The reliance on Mufliḥ was, however, inescapable, he "being the official who demanded admissions to al-Muqtadir when the latter was in his private apartments." Naṣr pleaded Ḥāmid's cause with him: "he is now, he said, an object of pity, and it would be like you to be merciful to him and not to punish him for what he did on those occasions." Ḥāmid asked Mufliḥ to deliver to the caliph his message. Mufliḥ promised Ḥāmid to take his message to the caliph but instead he spoke to al-Muqtadir on the subject of Ḥāmid in a style that was contrary to the one promised. Al-Muqtadir, upon the recommendation of Mufliḥ, ordered Naṣr to dispatch Ḥāmid to Ibn al-Furāt.⁴⁴

This whole episode reflects the ever-increasing influence of Mufliḥ, giving a picture of the relative powers of individuals holding positions within the palace. The interventions which seem to have been carried out through Mufliḥ led to Ḥāmid's downfall, his imprisonment, and ultimate capture by al-Muḥassin. Mufliḥ, as the leading eunuch, had control over access to the caliph when the

⁴² Louis Massignon, *La passion d'al-Hosayn ibn Mansour al-Hallaj* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1921), 1: 288.

⁴³ Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 1: 87; *Eclipse*, 1: 96-7; 'Arib, *Šilat*, 112; and Hilāl al-Sābi', *Kitāb tuḥfat al-umarā' fī tārikh al-wuzarā'*, ed. H. F. Amedroz (Beirut: Catholic Press, 1904), 243-4.

⁴⁴ Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 1: 107-8; *Eclipse*, 1: 107-108; Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kāmil*, 8: 140-1.

latter was in the harem. Naşr the chamberlain had to call on Muflih precisely because he, Naşr, could not enter the harem. Muflih had greater access to the caliph and this made perhaps, all the difference. It was his status as eunuch—in other words, his gender—which gave Muflih precious access. The power of the eunuchs stemmed directly from this one factor: they had spatial access to the caliph in his private quarters, the harem, when everyone else—all the other men, that is—did not. Indeed, Miskawayh states that “Muflih was high in Muqtadir’s favor, and constantly in attendance.”⁴⁵

His access to the caliph allowed Muflih to play a crucial role by introducing influential people to the caliph. One reads that Abū Bakr b. Qarabah had ingratiated himself with Muflih who introduced him to al-Muqtadir.⁴⁶ Another such instance involved a man called Dāniālī who had managed to be in special favor with Muflih, having informed him that he had found in his ancient books that Muflih was a descendant of Ja‘far b. Abū Ṭālib—cousin of Prophet Muḥammad. Muflih had rewarded him liberally for the discovery and tried to influence the caliph into choosing Dāniālī’s candidate, Ḥusayn b. Qāsim, as his next vizier.⁴⁷

Muflih interceded for Ibn al-Furāt when the latter was under threat of being arrested by the palace retainers. Muflih advised the caliph that to dismiss a vizier owing to the statements and encouragement of his enemies was dangerous and bad policy, and an encouragement for the retainers to interfere in affairs of state.⁴⁸ Al-Muqtadir followed Muflih’s advice and Ibn al-Furāt owed his freedom during this particular instance to Muflih, who had, thus, scored with Ibn al-Furāt, one of the most important viziers during the reign of al-Muqtadir. This is stressed by Hilāl al-Şābi’, who states that Muflih, the black eunuch of al-Muqtadir, had an advanced standing with and a strong influence over Ibn al-Furāt.⁴⁹

A major product of the eunuchs’ closeness to the caliph was that those who wanted favors from the caliph could and did obtain them by greasing the eunuch’s palm to get him to espouse their cause, convinced as they were of the persuasive powers of the eunuchs. These activities were, thus, lucrative and paid, later on, in dividends. We know from Miskawayh that Muflih’s position allowed him to accumulate wealth, and he became the owner of vast estates.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 1: 87; *Eclipse*, 1: 96.

⁴⁶ Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 1: 212; *Eclipse*, 1: 237-238.

⁴⁷ Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 1: 215-6; *Eclipse*, 1: 241-2.

⁴⁸ Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 1: 124-5; *Eclipse*, 1: 138-9 and Hilāl al-Şābi’, *Tārikh*, 51.

⁴⁹ Hilāl al-Şābi’, *Tārikh*, 212.

⁵⁰ Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 1: 87 and 155-6. On the wealth that the chief black eunuch of the Ottoman imperial harem achieved, see Jane Hathaway “The Wealth and Influence of an Exiled Ottoman Eunuch in Egypt: The Waqf Inventory of ‘Abbās Agha,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 37 (1994): 293-317.

Thus, eunuchs gained privileges for themselves, exacting fees for audiences and, in a few instances, exacting commissions from appointees to public office in return for their influence in the process of selection. Exploiting such opportunities during the reign of al-Muqtadir, Mufliḥ managed to accumulate a fortune.

The eunuchs' power depended on and fueled the tension between the caliph and the other power elements in the state. One of the main poles of power during the reign of al-Muqtadir, another eunuch, was Mu'nīs who achieved his eminence in leading the defense in 296/908 of the Ḥasanī palace at Baghdad for al-Muqtadir against the pretender Ibn al-Mu'tazz. Later on, Munis' authority was confirmed through his successful generalship. He became all-powerful, was consulted on the appointment of viziers, and was increasingly in control of the government. Blaming the caliph for squandering and wasting money, Mu'nīs addressed a letter to the caliph stating that the army complained bitterly about the money and land wasted upon the eunuchs and the women of the court, and of their participation in the administration. He demanded their dismissal and removal from the palace, with seizure of their possessions.⁵¹ In his reply to Mu'nīs, al-Muqtadir came to the defense of the eunuchs and women:

... Now what our friends propose in the matter of the eunuchs and women, whom they would cast out of the Palace and remove far away, and whose emoluments for their service they hold should lapse, so that they should be precluded and deprived of their fortunes and kept at a distance from them until they deliver up the money and the estates which are in their hands, and restore them to their rightful owners, that is a proposal, which, if they properly considered and examined it, they would know to be an unjust proposal, and one whose iniquity is obvious to me. Still so anxious am I to agree with them... so that I am giving orders for the seizure of some of their fiefs, for the abolition of their privileges... and for the removal from the palace of all whom it is permissible to expel while those who remain shall not be permitted to interfere with my administration or counsels...⁵²

The answer acknowledges the powerful eunuchs—and women—as fief-holders and points to the privileges they have. Explicit reference is made to their interference in the administration. The caliph promised to curb their political influence but only in order to appease Mu'nīs.

Mufliḥ's resistance to Mu'nīs is understandable in light of the latter's effort to curb the influence and wealth of the eunuchs and other courtiers. Miskawayh states that at the head of the conspirators against Mu'nīs stood the eunuch Mufliḥ. The confidence of the caliph in Mufliḥ was such that when Mu'nīs wrote in 319/931 to al-Muqtadir that Mufliḥ was conspiring with Ḥusayn b. Qāsim against him and that Mufliḥ should be sent to him, al-Muqtadir replied

⁵¹ Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 1: 189; *Eclipse*, 1: 213 and Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 8: 200.

⁵² Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 1: 189-190; *Eclipse*, 1: 213-214.

that Muflīḥ was a faithful servant in whom he had confidence, and not the man to be mixed up in what Mu'nīs was suggesting.⁵³ The caliph's belief in the eunuch's loyalty and devotion was absolute. In the end it was Muflīḥ and other courtiers who hated Mu'nīs who prevailed in convincing the caliph to confront Mu'nīs militarily, and this against the caliph's mother's better judgment.⁵⁴ The caliph was killed during this confrontation.

CONCLUSION

The two main reasons given as to why the Byzantine emperors were keen on employing eunuchs at court have generally been that eunuchs could never aspire to be emperors themselves and that they were safe to have around females. While these explanations are, in the words of Shawn F. Tougher, "half-truths," Keith Hopkins has proposed that the eunuchs' real function was to soak up criticism "which might otherwise have fallen upon the ruler and so acted as a lubricant preventing too much friction between the ruler and the other forces of the state."⁵⁵ The eunuchs served as go-betweens in transactions between men and women of the court and between the court and the outside world. Eunuchs were involved in mediating, brokering, and transmitting messages between persons who were constrained by etiquette from meeting the caliph directly. Many of the roles and functions ascribed primarily to eunuchs involved mediations and transactions across boundaries.

Eunuchism, thus, had a much broader dimension. The particular situation pertaining at the court of al-Muqtadir accounted for the increasing power and influence with which eunuchs were invested. The reign of al-Muqtadir exposed the tension between the various powers of the state. This allowed the palace officials, notably eunuchs, to become power brokers, a situation rendered more advantageous still by the constant removals of viziers which increased competition among bureaucrats. The eunuchs schemed for or against the bureaucrats by bringing information to the caliph which bureaucrats could not deliver by themselves. The tremendous and sustained influence which court eunuchs were able to bring to bear during the reign of al-Muqtadir is demonstrated by their occupation of a regularly increasing number of high-ranking offices. The seclusion of the caliph behind a highly formalized court ritual accentuated the need

⁵³ Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 1: 222; *Eclipse*, 1: 249.

⁵⁴ 'Arib, *Şilat*, 165-6, 175.

⁵⁵ Shaun F. Tougher, "Byzantine Eunuchs: An Overview, with Special Reference to their Creation and Origin," *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (London: Routledge, 1997), 168-184; Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 174-180.

of various power groups around the caliph for intermediaries. The eunuchs exploited this situation, appropriating to themselves some of the power in controlling the distribution of favors through their privileged proximity to the caliph.

The reign of al-Muqtadir was intimately connected with eunuchs who played key roles at the court, protecting the inexperienced caliph, performing courtly duties while some of them managed to assume important public functions. Their role as confidants provided them access to very influential positions as requests were finagled into their hands. Šāfi played a major role in installing the young al-Muqtadir as caliph, protecting him at the outset of his rule. Mufliḥ carried letters, demanded admissions to the caliph, and used his proximity to the caliph and his abilities in persuasion to influence the caliph in appointments of the highest importance and in other significant political matters. Indeed, the extent of political power and sway which a eunuch could attain are reflected in the career of Mufliḥ, who managed to forge alliances with powerful and influential people through his intercession with the caliph. The degree of power wielded by those in the palace corresponded not to the hierarchy of positions but rather to the frequency of access to the caliph. Proximity to the caliph and the assurance of his favor was the crucial basis of the court eunuchs' power.

According to Kathryn Ringrose, "gendering involves the assignment of specific roles in society."⁵⁶ Many of the roles assigned to eunuchs in the fourth/tenth century Abbasid court, were deemed unmasculine tasks, acting as 'masters of ceremony', controlling access to the caliph, as doorkeepers and servants, and dwelling in the company of women and children in the harem. Taking on such duties, eunuchs stood "as the antithesis to elite masculinity, and as a reminder that gender organizes relationships of power among men as much as between men and women."⁵⁷ Genderless and kinless, eunuchs constituted the ultimate outsiders. From their powerlessness, however, sprang considerable influence in the form of great confidence and authority within the caliphs' court and household.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Kathryn Ringrose, "Living in the Shadows: Eunuchs and Gender in Byzantium," *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, ed. Gilbert Herdt (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 85-519. Kathleen Biddick has analyzed eunuchs as "a kind of 'period piece' at sites of conflict between conventional historiographic periodization . . . and queer temporalities." "Translating the Foreskin," in *Queering the Middle Ages*, eds. Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kurger (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 193-212.

⁵⁷ Julia M. H. Smith, "Did Women Have a Transformation of the Roman World?" *Gender and History* 12 (2000): 552-571.

⁵⁸ Cheikh Moussa, "Gāhiz et les eunuques;" Michael McCormick has analyzed aspects of the eunuchs' power in Byzantium in "Emperors," *The Byzantines*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo, trans. Thomas Dunlap et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 230-254.

This paper has tried to explain why and how eunuchs held power in the early fourth/tenth-century Abbasid court. While studying the particular roles and functions of eunuchs provides insight into the operation of the caliphal apparatus, the sources say little about how eunuchs actually fitted in other parts of society. The work of exploring the social and cultural placement of eunuchs to investigate aspects of their sexual and gender identities still remains to be done.

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Sodomie et masculinité chez les juristes musulmans du IX^e au XI^e siècle

Mohammed Mezziane

Résumé

La régulation de la sexualité masculine et féminine par le droit musulman classique n'obéit pas à des préoccupations de morale, de préservation d'un hypothétique « ordre naturel » ou même de la perpétuation de l'espèce, mais à la préservation de l'ordre public. À ce titre, les divers châtiements prévus contre les transgressions sexuelles sont conçus pour être appliqués en lien étroit avec le degré de nuisance qu'ils génèrent. Le présent article présente cette thèse dans le cadre de deux hypothèses : le lien entre *fisq*, espace et sexualité ; le lien entre masculinité et sexualité.

Mots-clé

sodomie, homosexualité, masculinité, sexualité musulmane, *ḥudūd*, *fisq*

Abstract

The regulation of masculine and feminine sexuality by the Classic Muslim law doesn't respond to moral or procreation concerns, nor even to preservation of an hypothetical "Natural order". It responds, rather, to the preservation of social order. Therefore, different punishments against sexual transgressions are thought to be strictly applied with harm degree that those transgressions produce. The present article presents this thesis in the context of two axes : the links between *fisq*, space and sexuality and the relationships between masculinity and sexuality.

Keywords

sodomy, homosexuality, masculinity, Islamic sexuality, *ḥudūd*, *fisq*.

Introduction

L'identité sexuelle est l'un des objets de recherche les plus questionnés ces dernières années en sciences sociales¹ : homosexualité, hétérosexualité, place de la

¹ De multiples travaux sur l'homosexualité, la sexualité et/ou la masculinité ont été menés ces trente dernières années en Occident. Beaucoup de ces travaux sont américains, même si en France, par exemple, de très nombreuses recherches ont été publiées ces dix dernières années. Des querelles d'approche conceptuelle ont divisé les universitaires au début des années 90. L'objet du différend, dans le sillage des travaux sur le genre, portait entre autre sur les identités sexuelles (homosexualité/hétérosexualité). Certains chercheurs la considéraient comme une réalité socialement et historiquement construite, à partir du XIX^e siècle. Pour d'autres, ces identités sexuelles

sexualité dans la définition des identités de genre (masculin/féminin). Cet intérêt soutenu est lié, en partie, au bouleversement du statut juridique de l'homosexualité dans les sociétés occidentales. En quelques décennies l'homosexualité a été dépénalisée, le couple homosexuel a obtenu une reconnaissance juridique et parfois des statuts juridiques équivalents à ceux des couples hétérosexuels.

Simultanément, l'offensive juridique de nombreux pays arabes² contre les « déviants » sexuels (homosexuels) esquisse un mouvement inverse, et soulève de multiples questions quant à l'argumentaire utilisé pour légitimer la répression.

seraient naturelles et existeraient depuis toujours : seules leurs représentations sociales (positives ou négatives) seraient construites et évolueraient d'une époque à l'autre. Une querelle largement dépassée aujourd'hui : peu de chercheurs soutiennent encore que ces identités ne sont pas construites, et à partir du XIX^e siècle seulement. Sur l'émergence des identités sexuelles, voir à titre indicatif Leo Barsani, *Homos, repenser l'identité*, trad. de l'angl. (États-Unis) par Christian Marouby, Paris, Éditions Odile Jacob, 1998 ; George Chauncey, *Gay New York, 1890-1940*, trad. de l'angl. (États-Unis) par Didier Eribon, Paris, Fayard, 2003, pp. 9-46 ; David Halperin, *Cent ans d'homosexualité, et autres essais sur l'amour grec*, trad. de l'américain par I. Châtelet, Paris, EPEL, 2000 ; David Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, trad. E. Eribon, Paris, EPEL, 2001. Pour la période antique et le sens attribué aux rôles sexuels, voir : Eva Cantarella, *Selon la nature, l'usage et la loi : la bisexualité dans le monde antique*, trad. M.-D. Porcheron, Paris, La Découverte, 1991 ; James Dover, *Homosexualité grecque*, trad. Suzanne Saïd, Claix, La pensée sauvage, 1982, (1^{re} éd. Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, 1978). Par ailleurs, sur les liens entre sexualité, nature, normalité, et médicalisation, les travaux de Michel Foucault ont ouvert de vastes perspectives. Voir notamment *Les anormaux, cours au Collège de France (1974-1975)*, éd. établie sous la direction de F. Ewald et A. Fontana, par V. Marchetti et A. Salomoni, Paris, Seuil-Gallimard, 1999, pp. 155-303, ainsi que le premier volume de l'*Histoire de la sexualité. La volonté de savoir*, Paris, Gallimard, 1976. Enfin, la référence théorique pour les études sur le genre (construction de la masculinité et de la féminité) est l'incontournable Judith Butler, *Trouble dans le genre. Pour un féminisme de la subversion*, préf. E. Fassin, trad. C. Kraus, Paris, La Découverte, 2005. Ces querelles entre constructionnistes et essentialistes sont aussi présentes dans quelques études sur l'homosexualité dans un espace musulman. Nous en rendrons compte ci-dessous.

² Les poursuites judiciaires pour le motif d'homosexualité se sont multipliées ces dernières années dans de nombreux pays arabes, dont l'Égypte, avec le procès très médiatisé des cinquante-deux Égyptiens arrêtés dans une boîte de nuit et jugés par un tribunal militaire en 2001. Voir Jean Gaudin, « De la haine au crime, l'homophobie », *Chronique d'Amnesty International*, 175 (juin 2001). En Arabie Saoudite, trois hommes accusés d'homosexualité sont décapités (Voir Mouna Naïm, « En Arabie saoudite, trois personnes ont été décapitées pour homosexualité », *Le Monde*, 4 janv. 2002, p. 5) ; il s'agit de la traduction française, des usages de la presse française, s'agit-il de « same-sex relations » ? Quel est le terme arabe usité par les autorités saoudiennes ? On ne sait pas. Les exactions sont par ailleurs régulières dans ce pays, et l'une des dernières en date concerne l'arrestation de 110 homosexuels dans un appartement privé et la condamnation d'une trentaine d'entre eux (six mois à un an de prison, et 200 à 2000 coups de fouet). Voir http://citegay.fr/ACTUALITES/GAY/241837/actualites_visu.htm. Enfin le Maroc, où, en juin 2004, quarante-trois hommes sont arrêtés, dans une ville du Nord du Maroc, dans une soirée privée et accusés de « déviance sexuelle ». Voir l'article de Karim Boukhari dans *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* (1^{er}-7 mars 2003), p. 4 et un article anonyme « La chasse aux homos », *Tel Quel*, Casablanca, 131(12-19 juin 2004).

Si la plupart de ces pays n'appliquent plus la *šari'a*³, la légitimation de la répression s'enracine néanmoins en partie dans le corpus théologico-juridique de l'époque médiévale. Les ouvrages contemporains de *fiqh* assimilent d'abord l'homosexualité à une maladie qui serait porteuse d'un risque pour la société humaine : dénatalité, maladies... Les sources utilisées par les juristes de l'époque médiévale pour élaborer le statut juridique de l'acte de sodomie sont mobilisées par les théologiens modernes dans une perspective principalement morale⁴ ; ils désignent l'homosexualité comme une pratique contre-nature qu'il s'agirait d'éradiquer⁵. Les motivations qui les incitent aujourd'hui à soutenir la répression de l'homosexualité seraient, selon eux, équivalentes à celles qui ont conduit les juristes de l'époque médiévale à instaurer un cadre juridique « sévère » pour les actes de sodomie.

Le corpus juridique de l'époque médiévale, comme les motivations des juristes qui ont légiféré sur le statut juridique de la sexualité illicite, sont aussi l'objet de questionnement dans la recherche contemporaine sur le statut de la sexualité dans un cadre musulman. Arno Schmitt, dans une étude récente, a ainsi exploré et mis en perspective d'une manière détaillée le statut du sodomite⁶ et la position des juristes des différentes écoles juridiques de la période

³ À l'exception de l'Arabie Saoudite, aucun pays arabe n'applique la *šari'a* pour sanctionner la sodomie. Et, en ce qui concerne l'Arabie saoudite, qu'entend-on, de toute manière, par *šari'a* ?

⁴ Les ouvrages de droit musulman (*fiqh*) contemporains inscrivent en effet la lutte contre l'homosexualité dans une tradition qui remonterait à l'aube de l'Islam et mobilisent à cet effet le Coran, les hadiths, et les traditions des différentes écoles juridiques sunnites. Considérant l'homosexualité comme anhistorique, ces ouvrages ignorent la différence entre sodomie (l'acte sexuel) et homosexualité (identité sexuelle). Voir notamment al-Šayḥ Aḥmad Muḥammad 'Assāf, « al-Mu'āmalāt », *al-Aḥkām al-fiqhiyya fi l-madāhib al-islāmiyya l-arba'a*, revu et commenté par al-Šayḥ Sa'd al-Dīn al-'Aytānī, Beyrouth, Dār Iḥyā' al-'Ulūm, 1988, II, pp. 514-520. Voir aussi les ouvrages de vulgarisation à grande diffusion, comme celui de Youcef Quaradhaoui, *Le licite et l'illicite en islam*, trad. de l'arabe par Salaheddine Kechrid, Paris, Okad Rayhane, 1990, pp. 122, 141-143, 160 ; al-Mūsawī, *al-Nizām al-iḡtimā'ī fi l-islām*, Beyrouth, Dār al-Safwa, 1992, pp. 12, 26-27, 34-35, 37.

⁵ L'utilisation par les théologiens musulmans contemporains d'une terminologie comme « sexualité contre-nature » ou « sexualité pathologique » pour qualifier l'homosexualité (appelée *liwāt*, ou *ṣudūd ġinsī*) renvoie à la caractérisation occidentale de l'homosexualité telle que constituée au XIX^e siècle. Nous verrons que ces caractères ne sont pas opérants pour la période médiévale.

⁶ Selon Arno Schmitt (« *Liwāt im fiqh: Männliche Homosexualität?* », *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 4/2 (2002), pp. 51, 57), la traduction de *liwāt* par « homosexualité » ou « pédérastie » est impropre. Si l'homosexualité désigne les relations sexuelles entre personnes du même sexe, le *liwāt* de l'époque médiévale, lui, désigne l'acte anal indépendamment du sexe du partenaire. De même, « *amal qawm Lūt* », communément et presque exclusivement utilisé dans les livres du *fiqh*, renvoie uniquement à l'acte anal (*ibid.*, pp. 53, 59). Par ailleurs, les termes de *liwāt*, *lāpa*, *lawwāt*, qu'Arno Schmitt définit, apparaissent rarement dans les livres du *fiqh* ou les

médiévale⁷. Mais, note l'auteur, la peine imposée par les *fūqahā'* aux sodomites ne semble pas avoir été dissuasive⁸. Il y aurait à cela deux raisons : la procédure nécessaire pour sa mise en application⁹, et l'origine sociale des juristes. Mālik b. Anas, Abū Ḥanīfa, ou Ṣaybānī, etc., étaient des commerçants ou des artisans ; d'origine arabe pour la plupart, ils habitaient de petites villes provinciales (Koufa, Basra, ou Médine), donc trop éloignées des grands centres urbains [lieux de pouvoir], pour faire appliquer les sanctions. Par ailleurs, ils

exégèses des hadiths, mais plutôt dans la littérature. D'autres recherches anglo-saxonnes publiées ces dernières années confirment qu'on ne peut assimiler « homosexualité » à *liwāt*. Outre Arno Schmitt, voir notamment Khalid El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 137, qui arrive aux mêmes conclusions à propos de l'Empire ottoman des XVI^e et XVII^e siècles ; selon Khalid El-Rouayheb, les *fūqahā'* ne traitent pas de la fellation et considèrent qu'embrasser ou caresser un homme n'est guère répréhensible ; les caresses entre un homme et une femme étaient même plus sévèrement punies que celles entre deux hommes ou celles entre deux femmes (*ibid.*, p. 139) ; tomber amoureux d'un garçon était considéré comme un acte involontaire et n'était pas condamnable : les religieux admettaient qu'une personne morte pour l'amour d'un garçon entrerait au Paradis s'il n'y avait pas eu de consommation. Citons encore E.K. Rowson (« The Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity in Medieval Vice Lists », dans *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, éd. J. Epstein et K. Straub, New York, Routledge, 1991, pp. 64, 65, 72), qui arrive aux mêmes conclusions, en étudiant les écrits d'*adab*, et décrit précisément la classification proposée par un manuel d'instruction littéraire de l'époque médiévale (sodomite, fornicateur, proxénète, relation anale hétérosexuelle, etc.). Cependant, E.K. Rowson utilise systématiquement le terme *irregularity*, pour désigner les conduites illicites, sans préciser si cette irrégularité s'oppose à une norme, telle que conceptualisée en Europe à partir du XVIII^e siècle, prémisses à une médicalisation de l'homosexualité. Citons par ailleurs l'article ancien de Franz Rosenthal, « Ar-Rāzī on the hidden illness », *Bulletin of the History Medicine*, 52 (1978), pp. 45-60 (reprinted with the permission of Johns Hopkins University Press. Courtesy of Yale University Seeley G. Mudd Library). Il y présente et commente le point de vue médical, à l'époque médiévale musulmane, sur la *ubna* (sodomie passive). Enfin, certains auteurs, comme J. Massad, « Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World », *Public Culture*, 14/2 (2002), pp. 361-385, vont jusqu'à mettre en question la pertinence de la notion d'homosexualité dans les pays arabes contemporains (emploi d'une notion qui marquerait la volonté de l'Occidental de doter ses valeurs et son histoire d'une portée universelle).

⁷ Son article expose les positions de la plupart des écoles juridiques musulmanes de la période médiévale et résume la position de juristes plus tardifs (modernes et contemporains) de ces écoles. Ces positions n'ont d'ailleurs guère évolué, selon A. Schmitt, entre la période médiévale et celles plus tardives (moderne et contemporaine).

⁸ Les pratiques sociales telles qu'elles transparaissent dans la littérature d'*adab* montrent l'échec dissuasif de cette loi. De nombreux travaux ont par ailleurs interrogé la valeur de témoignage du *muğūn*, littérature qui représentait les pratiques illicites dont la sodomie. Voir notamment les articles de J.W. Wright, E.K. Rowson et F. Rosenthal dans *Homeroeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1997 ; E.K. Rowson, « The Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity in Medieval Vice Lists », *op. cit.* ; Frédéric Lagrange, « L'obscénité du vizir », *Arabica*, 53/1 (2006), pp. 54-107.

⁹ La procédure pour établir la culpabilité d'un homme ayant commis l'acte de sodomie est explicitée dans le chapitre ci-dessous.

appartenaient à un milieu «petit bourgeois» à la morale sévère; ils auraient légitimé sur l'acte de sodomie (*'amal qawm Lūt*) en instituant leur mode de vie [puritain] en norme. Toutefois, affirme Arno Schmitt, un tel mode de vie était étranger et éloigné de la vie urbaine de leurs contemporains, à savoir la masse du peuple ou l'élite imprégnée de culture hellénistique (Damas, Bagdad)¹⁰. Aussi s'étonne-t-il de l'illogisme de la démarche des juristes, qui semblent peu soucieux de la mise en oeuvre de leurs lois, et l'attribue-t-il à une approche [aveuglement] morale de la sexualité¹¹.

Mais Arno Schmitt a-t-il correctement analysé le champ d'application de la peine, pour affirmer ainsi que celle-ci n'était que peu ou pas appliquée? Cette question nous semble devoir d'abord être posée.

Le présent article interrogera donc la démarche des juristes des IX^e-XI^e siècles dans le champ de la sexualité¹². Démarche qui est différente, selon nous, de celle de leurs successeurs contemporains. Et si l'attitude des *fuqahā'* vis-à-vis du *lūṭī* a généralement été analysée sous l'angle de son assimilation ou non au *zānī*, nous nous préoccupons plutôt de son assimilation au *fāsiq*. Deux interrogations nous permettront de nous représenter la sexualité médiévale et

¹⁰ Par la suite, cette loi aurait réussi à acquérir un statut sacré. Les autorités politiques se seraient instituées garantes de cette loi. Quant aux sodomites, ils se seraient adaptés à cette situation en adoptant des pratiques discrètes (Schmitt, «Liwāṭ», p. 109.). Mais si l'activité sexuelle passive était mal vue, ce n'était pas le cas de l'activité sexuelle active, qui ne remet pas en question la masculinité, toujours selon Arno Schmitt qui cite E.K. Rowson («Categorization», p. 55). Dans son travail sur la sexualité dans le monde antique, E. Cantarella (*Nature*) a avancé une hypothèse semblable.

¹¹ Schmitt, «Liwāṭ», pp. 108-110.

¹² Pour ce, nous nous référerons à l'exégèse du Coran et de la Sunna, ainsi qu'à la casuistique historique utilisée par les juges des grandes villes comme matériaux juridiques. La casuistique n'étant pas toujours clairement exposée, nous ne pouvons réduire nos sources à un seul juriste, si éminent et précis soit-il. D'où aussi le recours à des *fuqahā'* postérieurs comme al-Qurtubī (XIII^e siècle) ou al-Kāsānī (XII^e siècle). Afin de circonscrire et d'éclaircir la nature des arguments qualifiant les actes prohibés, il nous faudra nous référer à de nombreux juristes (ḥanafites: al-Ğaṣṣās, al-Saraḥsī ou al-Kāsānī; mālikites: al-Bāġī, parfois Ibn 'Arabī ou al-Qurtubī; šāfi'ite: al-Šāfi'ī; zāhirite: Ibn Ḥazm). Ajoutons que notre travail n'a pas pour objet de préciser les normes et les différentes pratiques entre écoles juridiques, ce qui nécessiterait une étude spécifique de chaque école juridique.

Par ailleurs, nos principales sources relatives à la *sunna* sont les livres canoniques validés par l'islam sunnite: al-Buḥārī (m. 256/870), *al-Ğāmi' al-Šaḥīḥ* (2762 hadiths différents); Muslim (m. 261/875), *al-Ğāmi' al-Šaḥīḥ* (4000 hadiths différents); Abū Dāwūd (m. 275/889), *Kitāb al-Sunan* (5273 hadiths); al-Tirmidī (m. 279/892), *Kitāb al-Ğāmi'*, (3956 hadiths); al-Nasā'ī (m. 303/915), *Kitāb al-Sunan*, (2800 hadiths), Ibn Māġa (m. 273/886), *Kitāb al-Sunan* (4341 hadiths); Mālik b. Anas (m. 179/795), *al-Muwatta'*; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad* (28000 à 29000 hadiths). Pour l'exégèse, nous nous référons surtout à al-Ṭabarī (225/840-310/923) et al-Ğaṣṣās (m. 370/980) dont les ouvrages sont parmi les plus anciens qui nous aient été conservés. Outre leurs commentaires, ils y reprennent ceux de leurs prédécesseurs.

notamment ses liens avec la procréation et la masculinité : la première portera sur la manière dont les juristes justifiaient la répression de la sodomie (affaire de la morale, ou préservation de l'ordre public?) ; nous verrons ensuite, toujours selon ces juristes, comment la masculinité se constituait, par quels actes ou quels rôles sexuels.

1. Sodomite et ordre public

1.1 *Les juristes et la sodomie : une approche empirique et pragmatique*

On aurait du mal à retrouver dans les exégèses du Coran et du Hadith, du IX^e au XI^e siècle, une théorie précise de la sexualité. Les premiers musulmans hésitent. L'exemple de la polémique autour du statut du sodomite (*lūṭī*)¹³ est significatif à cet égard : certes, il désobéit à Dieu, mais doit-il être pour autant sanctionné dans le cadre de l'apostasie (*kufṛ*) ? Cette hésitation dissimule en réalité une interrogation plus large touchant à l'insoumission aux prescriptions de Dieu (*'iṣyān amr Allāh*) et au statut de l'insoumis (*al-'āṣī*) dans la société. L'insoumission (*fiṣq*)¹⁴ doit-elle être sanctionnée par l'exclusion des fautifs hors de la communauté musulmane (*takfīr*) ?

¹³ 'Amal qawm Lūṭ (acte du peuple de Lot) est la périphrase habituellement utilisée dans les livres de *fiqh* pour désigner l'acte de pénétration anale indépendamment du sexe biologique du partenaire (homme ou femme). Les termes *lūṭī* (sodomite) ou *liwāṭ* (sodomie) sont très rarement utilisés dans ces sources, tout comme les termes *lawwāṭ* (sodomite). Et comme le souligne K. El-Rouayheb (*Homosexuality*), pour les juristes, le *lūṭī* est celui qui a pratiqué l'acte de pénétration anale ne serait-ce qu'une seule fois, indépendamment donc de la fréquence et de la persistance de cette pratique sexuelle. Nous utiliserons dans ce travail les termes sodomie ('amal qawm Lūṭ) et sodomite (*lawwāṭ* et *lūṭī*) dans le sens juridique défini ci-dessus.

¹⁴ Le *fiṣq* est habituellement traduit par désordre moral, libertinage, péché, débauche, impiété... Voir notamment le résumé de L. Gardet, intitulé « Fāṣiḳ », *EF*. Voir aussi Joseph Schacht qui traduit *fāsiq* par pécheur (*Introduction au droit musulman*, Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 1983, p. 149), ou Mohammad H. Benkheira (*L'amour de la Loi. Essai sur la normativité en Islam*, Paris, PUF, 1997, pp. 72, 152). Nous avons choisi de mettre en évidence un sens plus neutre : insoumission aux prescriptions de Dieu (*'iṣyān awāmīr Allāh*), sans préjuger de la dimension morale liée aux actes prohibés. *'Iṣyān Allāh* (insoumission à Dieu) est le sens donné au *fiṣq* dans les exégèses de cette époque (al-Ṭabarī, *Gāmi'*, XXX/1, pp. 182, 306). Nous montrerons que, pour notre période, les arguments des juristes musulmans concernant les proscriptions de Dieu s'articulent à la préservation de l'ordre public plutôt qu'à la morale. J.-C. Vadet (*Les idées morales dans l'Islam*, Paris, PUF, 1995, pp. 88-91, 97) analyse l'importance de l'obéissance, notamment celle due au Prophète, et le lien avec l'ordre social. Il explique aussi l'importance de la Loi dans l'Islam, et notamment que cette Loi n'est pas d'essence purement morale (pp. 147-196).

Le sodomite est-il un apostat ou un insoumis (fāsiq)?

Deux éminents juristes de la fin du VIII^e siècle, Abū Ḥanīfa et Mālik b. Anas¹⁵, ont des positions divergentes quand au statut de l'acte de sodomie (*'amal qawm Lūṭ*). Ils s'accordent sur la nécessité de le sanctionner, mais s'opposent sur la nature de la sanction. Le premier applique une peine qui est laissée à l'appréciation du juge (*ta'zīr*), et qui ne peut en aucun cas être la mort; d'après Abū Ḥanīfa, si Dieu avait voulu la mise à mort du sodomite (*lūṭī*), il l'aurait précisé. Le second, Mālik b. Anas, comme Abū Ḥanīfa se base sur des versets coraniques qui condamnent l'acte du peuple de Lot (*'amal qawm Lūṭ*). Mais il y adjoint un hadith (controversé) du Prophète où il est recommandé d'exécuter le sodomite au rôle sexuel «actif» (*al-fā'il*) ainsi que celui au rôle sexuel «passif» (*al-maf'ūl bihi*)¹⁶. Aussi, à l'opposé du premier, il considère que le «délit» est à classer dans la catégorie des infractions dont la peine est fixée par Dieu (*ḥadd*). Il assimile, en effet, ces pratiques à l'activité sexuelle illicite (*zinā*), et, en conséquence, condamne le coupable qui a déjà contracté un contrat de mariage (*muḥṣan*) à la peine réservée à l'adultère (*zinā*): cent coups de fouet suivis de la lapidation. Par ailleurs, il recommande également la peine de mort pour le coupable n'ayant jamais contracté un mariage.

Quant à la procédure pour établir la culpabilité, Mālik reprend celle de la fornication (*zinā*) pour l'appliquer à la sodomie, sans aucune modification. La procédure implique que l'incriminé, reconnu sain d'esprit, avoue son forfait en présence d'un juge, quatre fois et à quatre moments différents (l'aveu n'induit pas la culpabilité du partenaire qui, pour être inquiété, doit avouer lui aussi). Sinon, il est nécessaire de réunir le témoignage de quatre hommes, musulmans, majeurs, libres et intègres, ayant vu en même temps, à partir du même endroit, la même chose (à savoir les coupables, pendant que l'organe viril de l'un allait et venait dans l'orifice de l'autre, «comme le fil de laine dans le chas de l'aiguille»).

Ainsi, à partir de la fin du VIII^e siècle, ces juristes, développent en même temps deux statuts pour l'acte du peuple de Lot (sodomie), similaires quant à la catégorie juridique (relations sexuelles illicites), mais différents par la nature de la sanction (peine fixée par Dieu ou établie par les hommes). Si l'interdiction est unanime (*iğmā*), le désaccord se situe uniquement au niveau du cadre

¹⁵ Abū Ḥanīfa (m. 767) et Mālik b. Anas (715-795) sont considérés comme les fondateurs des écoles juridiques hanafite et mālikite. Sur la formation des écoles juridiques, la construction du corpus des hadiths, etc. voir Schacht, *Introduction*, pp. 26-62, 97-99, 69-75, 165-173. Voir aussi son résumé de la constitution des corpus de la tradition et des jurisprudences du *fiqh* dans «*Fikḥ*» *EP*.

¹⁶ Abū al-Walid al-Bāḡī (403/1012-474/1082), *al-Muntaqā, šarḥ al-Muwatta'*, Le Caire, Maṭba'at as-Sa'āda, 1332/1914. Consulté sur le site <http://hadith.al-islam.com>, p. 1298.

juridique à l'intérieur duquel ces actes doivent être punis : la peine fixe (*ḥadd*) relève d'un cadre juridique « sacré », institué par Dieu ; la peine discrétionnaire (*ta'zīr*) relève d'un cadre juridique mis en place par les hommes. Dans le premier cas, le juge ne peut qu'appliquer la peine prescrite par Dieu si les preuves sont réunies. Dans le second cas, le juge a toute latitude pour fixer la peine (abandon des poursuites, remontrances, amende, prison, coups de fouet ou exil) en tenant compte, notamment, du statut social du prévenu¹⁷.

Deux corpus majeurs, interprétés différemment par les deux écoles juridiques, vont justifier leurs positions respectives : le Coran avec les versets relatifs aux turpitudes du peuple de Lot ; les hadiths auxquels sont attribués un statut jurisprudentiel et la première jurisprudence établie notamment par Abū Bakr (1^{er} calife, 632-634).

Coran, Hadith et l'acte de sodomie

Les versets qui traitent des pratiques sexuelles du peuple de Lot sont classés dans une dizaine de sourates différentes¹⁸. Ils n'instituent aucune peine fixe (*ḥadd*), mais se contentent d'une condamnation générale des actes d'insoumission de ce peuple (débauche sexuelle en réunion publique, refus de donner l'hospitalité aux étrangers, viol des hommes étrangers à la cité, banditisme, consommation du vin, pratique du chant, etc.). Or cette « imprécision » posera d'autant plus de problèmes au législateur que le Prophète ne laisse ni jurisprudence ayant pour objet les actes de sodomie, ni exégèse sur les pratiques sexuelles évoquées dans ces versets¹⁹.

¹⁷ Il faut deux témoins pour constater l'acte sexuel anal chez les Ḥanafites. Il faut aussi que leur témoignage spécifie qu'ils ont vu l'organe de l'un dans l'orifice de l'autre.

¹⁸ Ce sont les versets des sourates al-A'raf (VII, 78-81) ; Hūd (XI, 79-84) ; al-Ḥijr (XV, 58-77) ; Les prophètes (XXI, 74-75) ; Les poètes (XXVI, 160-175) ; La fourmi (XXVII, 55-59) ; L'araignée (XXIX, 27-34) ; Les rangs (XXXVII, 127-132) ; Šād (XXXVIII, 12-13) ; Qāf (L, 13) ; La lune (LIV, 33-40), *Le Coran*, trad. Kazimirski, Manchecourt, 2002, pp. 137-138, 198, 232-233, 298, 347-348, 357, 374, 426, 431, 503, 521-522). Ces versets relatent comme on le sait les turpitudes du peuple de Lot et décrivent ses forfaits. L'ensemble des « délits » est aggravé par leur incroyance en Dieu. Après des avertissements répétés, les cités rebelles (Sodome, Gomorrhe et deux autres villages plus petits) sont détruites. Aucun habitant de cette région, à l'exception de Lot et de ses deux filles, n'échappe à la sanction. La question de la sexualité et du viol des étrangers n'est pas abordée dans chacune des treize occurrences. Voir aussi Schmitt, « Liwāt », pp. 60-64.

¹⁹ Les traditionnistes ainsi que les exégètes des IX^e-XI^e siècles ne rapportent qu'un seul hadith : « quelles actions illicites (*munkar*) le peuple de Lot pratiquait dans ses réunions (*nādhīm*) ? » (notre traduction). Or la réponse du Prophète n'évoque pas la sexualité, mais que le peuple de Lot jetait des pierres aux étrangers et s'en moquait (*yasharūn*). Voir l'exégèse d'al-Ṭabarī (*al-Ġāmi'*, XI, p. 145), Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (164/781-241/856), *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, éd. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Salām 'Abd al-Šāfi, Beyrouth, Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1993, VI, p. 450.

Mālik b. Anas ainsi qu'un grand nombre de juristes et d'exégètes de cette époque estiment que les versets en question, même s'ils ne recommandent pas de peine fixe (*ḥadd*), sont une claire indication aussi bien pour l'interdiction, que pour la sanction de la sodomie dans le cadre des peines fixées par Dieu (*ḥudūd*). Ils se réfèrent notamment aux supposées consultations juridiques (*fatwā*) d'Ibn 'Abbās²⁰.

Abū Ḥanīfa, nous l'avons vu, précise que si Dieu avait eu la volonté de punir cette pratique sexuelle par des peines fixes (*ḥudūd*), il l'aurait énoncée comme il l'a fait pour la consommation de l'alcool, le vol, les relations hétérosexuelles illicites (*zinā*), etc. Et il se réclame d'un hadith du Prophète qui assure qu'un musulman ne doit subir une peine fixe (*ḥadd*) qu'en vertu d'un texte clair du Coran ou du Prophète (*naṣṣ*) ou par un consensus (*iğmā'*). Or, ni le Coran ni le Hadith ne sont clairs sur cette question, et aucun consensus n'est établi. Les peines fixes sanctionnant la fornication (*zinā*), insiste Abū Ḥanīfa, ont été instaurées pour prévenir les nuisances graves et les désordres qui en résultent (confusion quant à la filiation biologique; perte financière pour les femmes, le montant de la dot pouvant être lié à leur virginité). Or, souligne-t-il, l'acte de sodomie ne détermine pas cette catégorie de problèmes. Il n'y a donc pas lieu de le prévenir avec cette catégorie de sanctions. Il faut le punir dans le cadre des peines discrétionnaires (*ta'zīr*) conclut-il²¹.

Au XI^e siècle, la position d'Ibn Ḥazm, juriste andalou et principal théologien de l'école juridique zāhirite, révèle que, trois siècles après cette controverse, l'exégèse des sourates à laquelle se réfèrent les tenants de l'application des peines fixes reste toujours en discussion²². En effet, Ibn Ḥazm, poussant

²⁰ Ibn 'Abbās, neveu et compagnon du Prophète, exégète et jurisconsulte du VII^e siècle, considéré comme le plus grand savant de la première génération des musulmans, recommande de lapider le sodomite quel que soit son rôle sexuel (actif ou passif) et son statut matrimonial (célibataire ou marié). Selon Claude Gilliot, la figure d'Ibn 'Abbās appartient plus au mythe qu'à l'histoire (« Portrait "mythique" d'Ibn 'Abbās », *Arabica*, XXXII (1985), pp. 127-184).

²¹ Voir Ibn al-'Arabī, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, éd. 'Alī l-Biğāwī, Beyrouth, Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāṭ al-'Arabī, 2001, III, pp. 269-271 ; al-Saraḥsī, *al-Mabsūt*, Beyrouth, Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1993, IX, pp. 77-78 ; Abū Bakr al-Ğaṣṣās, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, éd. Muḥammad al-Ğādiq Qamḥāwī, Beyrouth, Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāṭ al-'Arabī, 1405 H. Pour al-Ğaṣṣās, voir le texte en ligne (<http://feqh.alislam.com/Display.asp?Mode=1&DocID=7&MaksamID=368&ParagraphID=1393&Sharh=0&HitNo=3&Source=1&SearchString=G%24201%23%E1%E6%D8%230%231%230%23%23%23%23%23>).

²² Ibn Ḥazm est l'auteur d'*al-Muḥallā*, une synthèse des fondements du droit (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), de la théologie, ainsi que des divergences entre les écoles juridiques. Il y reprend l'ensemble des arguments relatifs à l'acte de sodomie développés par ses prédécesseurs, pour les réfuter. Ainsi nous restitue-t-il les différentes positions sur cette question, et leurs justifications.

sur ce point l'analyse plus loin qu'Abū Ḥanīfa²³, conteste que la destruction de Sodome ait eu pour seule origine la sexualité de ses habitants. C'est leur incroyance qui est principalement punie, affirme-t-il en réfutant l'ensemble de l'approche exégétique²⁴. Selon lui, c'est bien dans le cadre de l'insoumission à Dieu (*'iṣyān Allāh*) que ses prédécesseurs ont analysé les relations sexuelles entre hommes, mais sans que ces derniers aient explicité le lien avec l'incroyance. Ibn Ḥazm conduit sa démonstration par analogie avec l'histoire des autres peuples ayant subi les mêmes sévices que le peuple de Lot. Le sodomite, conclut-il, ne doit être puni par la mort que s'il proclame son apostasie²⁵.

On voit ainsi que ces dizaines de versets du Coran sur l'acte de sodomie entre hommes ne permettent pas d'instituer une norme juridique unique, comme, par exemple, pour les relations sexuelles illicites entre un homme et une femme (*zinā*)²⁶. Notons par ailleurs qu'à cette époque, aucun statut global de la sexualité n'est évoqué par les exégètes : nulle référence à sa fonction procréative (qui s'exprimerait, par exemple, par la crainte de l'anéantissement de l'espèce humaine) ou à une norme naturelle²⁷. La principale préoccupation est en lien avec l'ordre public : l'insoumission à Dieu (*fiṣq*) et le désordre (*fitna*).

Quant aux hadiths, il en existe plusieurs qui condamnent la sodomie (*'amal qawm Lūt*). Ils sont rapportés par quatre des six recueils canoniques du Hadith. Al-Buḥārī et Muslim les ont ignorés.

Un hadith en particulier est habituellement cité par les Mālikites, Ṣāfi'ites et Ḥanbalites pour justifier la sanction de la peine de mort : « Si vous trouvez

²³ Abū Ḥanīfa admet l'interprétation qui considère l'anéantissement du peuple de Lot comme une punition infligée au sodomite. Il refuse néanmoins de prescrire la peine de mort, du moment que les versets ne l'ont pas spécifié clairement.

²⁴ Les sourates relatives aux forfaits du peuple de Lot s'insèrent dans une scansion précédée ou suivie de la mention de deux autres peuples, punis de la même manière que lui : les Thamoudéens, peuple du Prophète Ṣāliḥ, et les habitants de la forêt de Maydān, peuple du Prophète Šu'ayb. Voir les mêmes sourates mentionnées ci-dessus, *Le Coran*, trad. R. Blachère, pp. 137-138, 198-199, 233, 345, 348-349, 356, 374-375, 520-521.

²⁵ Ibn Ḥazm (384/995-456/1064), *al-Muḥallā bi-l-āyāt*, éd. 'Abd al-Ġaffār Sulaymān al-Bandārī, Beyrouth, Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1988, XII, pp. 394-395. Voir aussi l'article de C. Adang, « Ibn Ḥazm on Homosexuality », *al-Qanṭara*, XXIV/1 (2003), pp. 5-31. Elle y présente et analyse le chapitre qu'Ibn Ḥazm consacre à l'acte de sodomie (*'amal qawm Lūt*) dans *al-Muḥallā*.

²⁶ Juriste ḥanafite, al-Ġaṣṣās élabore au X^e siècle une nouvelle exégèse du Coran où ne sont commentées que les sourates auxquelles les ḥanafites attribuent une valeur juridique, instituant des recommandations ou des peines fixes. Les versets relatifs aux forfaits du peuple de Lot en sont absents. Voir al-Ġaṣṣās, *Aḥkām*.

²⁷ Il y a quelques exceptions plus tardives : l'exégète mālikite al-Qurṭubī, au XIII^e siècle, inclut la procréation en argument « additionnel » à son argumentaire légitimant l'interdiction de l'acte de sodomie (*Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, Le Caire, Dār al-Ša'b, s.d., XIII, p. 341).

deux hommes pratiquant l'acte du peuple de Lot [sodomie], tuez (*uqtulū*) celui qui a un rôle sexuel actif (*al-fā'il*) et celui qui a un rôle sexuel passif (*al-maf'ūl bihi*) »²⁸.

Néanmoins, tout comme pour les versets coraniques, les exégètes des hadiths n'associent pas l'interdiction à un détournement de la sexualité : pas plus de référence ici qu'ailleurs à une crainte de la dénatalité. Seule la désobéissance à Dieu et l'insoumission aux prescriptions (*fisq*) représentent des arguments déterminants pour justifier l'interdit²⁹.

Le premier sodomite jugé et la première jurisprudence

La tradition retient que les premiers jugement et condamnation d'un sodomite musulman sont attribués au successeur du Prophète, Abū Bakr : Ḥalīd b. al-Walīd, au cours de sa campagne contre l'insurrection de l'une des tribus de la péninsule Arabique, sollicite des instructions sur le cas de Šuġā' b. Warqā l-Asādī accusé de se faire prendre comme les femmes (*yunkaḥu kamā tunkaḥu l-nisā*). Abū Bakr interroge les compagnons du Prophète : ils lui suggèrent la lapidation (peine qui sanctionne l'adultère), et seul 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib considère qu'il mérite le bûcher. La position de 'Alī est relatée dans deux versions différentes. Dans la première, il argue que Dieu a détruit le peuple de Lot pour cette action immonde (*fi'la šanī'a*). Il s'agit, d'après lui, d'une apostasie (*kufī*). Dans la seconde, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib met en avant une tout autre catégorie

²⁸ Traduit par nos soins, voir Ibn Māġa (207/823-275/889), *Sunan Ibn Māġa*, éd. Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, Beyrouth, Dār al-Fikr, s.d., II, p. 856. Le Prophète n'a jugé aucun litige ayant pour objet les relations sexuelles entre hommes. C'est du moins un fait qu'aucun exégète ou juriste ne conteste (Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya, *Zād al-Ma'ād fi hudā' hayr al-'ibād*, éd. Šu'ayb al-Arna'ūt et 'Abd al-Qādir al-Arna'ūt, Beyrouth, Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1987, V, pp. 40-41). Notons que les chaînes de transmission de la dizaine de hadiths recensés sont faibles (Abū Dāwūd (202/818-275/889), *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, éd. Badr al-Dīn Ġitīn 'Ār, Istanbul, Dār al-Da'wa, 1992, IV, 607-608; Ibn Māġa, *Sunan*; al-Tirmidī (209/825-279/893), *Sunan al-Tirmidī: al-Ġāmi' al-Šaḥīḥ*, éd. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad 'Uṭmān, Beyrouth, Dār al-Fikr, 1983, III, pp. 8-9; Ibn Ḥanbal (164/781-241/856), *Musnad al-Imām Ahmad b. Ḥanbal*, éd. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Salām 'Abd al-Šāfi, Beyrouth, Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1993, I, pp. 286, 391, 402, 412, 413).

Par ailleurs, Ibn Ḥazm n'accorde aucune valeur jurisprudentielle à l'ensemble de ces hadiths qui traitent de l'acte de sodomie. Il souligne justement la question de la fragilité de leurs chaînes de transmission (*al-Muḥallā*, XII, pp. 392-394). Les Malikites, les Šāfi'ites et les Ḥanbalites, eux, ne tiennent pas compte de ces réserves. Ils justifient la légitimité de la peine de mort contre l'acte de sodomie en évoquant ces hadiths, auxquels ils accordent ainsi une valeur juridique destinée à perdurer (al-Tirmidī, *Sunan*, p. 9; al-Šāfi'i, *Kitāb al-Umm*, éd. Muḥammad Zuhri l-Nağğār, Beyrouth, Dār al-Ma'rifa, s.d., VII, p. 183).

²⁹ Dans les exégèses canoniques, l'argument de la procréation n'est pas utilisé. Par ailleurs, seules quelques exégèses de hadiths, plus tardifs, comme 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Manāwī, par exemple, utilisent l'argument de la procréation (*Fayḍ al-Qadīr*, Le Caire, al-Maktaba l-Tiġāriya l-Kubrā, 1356 H, VI, p. 226).

d'arguments. D'après lui, « les bédouins (*a' rāb*) craindraient plus la célébrité qui découlerait d'une peine exemplaire que la peine en elle-même. Exécuter le coupable simplement dans le cadre d'une peine fixe (*ḥadd*) ne les impressionnerait pas ». Aussi conseille-t-il le bûcher comme peine exemplaire³⁰.

Soulignons que durant cette courte période, les deux années du califat de Abū Bakr, le bûcher n'est pas une sanction spécifique réservée aux sodomites. La tradition rapporte que cette punition s'applique à de nombreux actes considérés comme une rébellion³¹. Al-Fağā'a, un opposant à Abū Bakr, subira le même traitement que Šuğā' : il est condamné au bûcher pour rébellion, brûlé comme apostat (*kāfir*), en même temps que Šuğā' le sodomite.

Questions à propos de la première jurisprudence

Plusieurs éléments attirent l'attention, à propos de la tradition de cette première jurisprudence. D'abord, les compagnons du Prophète édictent leur sanction sans se réclamer de l'autorité du Prophète et sans mentionner de hadiths jurisprudentiels. Seul leur jugement, articulé aux versets qui relatent l'insoumission du peuple de Lot, suffit pour recommander les sévices, à partir du moment où la sodomie est considérée comme une insoumission. Notons par ailleurs le peu de précision de la procédure visant à établir la culpabilité du sodomite : il n'y a pas plus d'indications sur le nombre de témoins que sur un éventuel aveu³².

Sont donc sujets à controverse les versets relatifs aux forfaits du peuple de Lot aussi bien que les hadiths jurisprudentiels et la jurisprudence établie par les compagnons du Prophète. Zones d'ombre et hésitations accompagnent le

³⁰ Les événements relatifs à la première jurisprudence établie par Abū Bakr sont relatés par al-Ġāhiz dans l'épître *Mufaḥarat al-Ġaw āri wa-l-ġilmān*, *Rasā'il al-Ġāhiz*, éd. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, Le Caire, Maktabat al-Ḥanjī, s.d., II, pp. 100-101 ; Ibn Ḥazm, *De l'amour et des amants. Taṭuq al-Ḥamāma fī l-ullaf wa-l-ullāf*, trad. de l'arabe G. Martinez-Gros, Paris, Sindbad, 1992, p. 225 ; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā*, XII, pp. 388-392 ; Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Aḥkām*, III, p. 438 ; al-Bāḡi, *al-Muntaqa*.

³¹ Les historiens arabes rapportent que la succession du Prophète se déroule dans des conditions difficiles. Abū Bakr consacre la majeure partie de son califat à réprimer les mouvements politico-religieux et sécessionnistes qui se déclenchent à la mort de Muḥammad (période appelée la *ridḍa*, apostasie). Pour rétablir l'ordre, il n'hésite pas à utiliser la menace d'apostasie (*takfir*) pour le moindre manquement au dogme : ne pas faire sa prière, ne pas payer l'impôt légal (*zakāt*), ne pas jeûner pendant le ramadan, etc.

³² La tradition de cette jurisprudence n'a pas été retenue dans l'ensemble des recensements des sources canoniques (*Sunan*). Si le supplice infligé à al-Fağā'a, le rebelle, est répertorié dans al-Buḥārī (194/810-256/870), *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī*, éd. Muṣṭafā Dīb al-Buḡā, Beyrouth, Mu'assasat al-Ḥadāmāt li-l-Ṭibā'a, 1980, III, p. 1098, et a rencontré un large consensus chez les traditionnistes, celui de Šuğā' le sodomite, l'est moins : Muslim et Buḥārī ne le mentionnent pas.

statut de l'acte du peuple de Lot (sodomie)³³, attestant d'un statut non précisé au moins jusqu'à la fin du VIII^e siècle : les sodomites sont, peut-être, exécutés sur dénonciation, d'abord par le bûcher, ensuite par lapidation aux VII^e-VIII^e siècles³⁴.

La formation d'un consensus

En somme, si l'on suit les traditions rapportées et les statuts finalement retenus pour qualifier les sodomites, on constate que l'accusation d'apostasie, évoquée dans un premier temps, est délaissée au profit de l'insoumission aux prescriptions de Dieu (*fiṣq*)³⁵. Dans la seconde moitié du VIII^e siècle, Mālik b. Anas et Abū Ḥanīfa, tout comme l'ensemble des juristes qui leur succèdent, en tirent les conséquences juridiques : la sodomie est interdite, mais le sodomite n'est pas un apostat.

Abū Yūsuf³⁶, cité par al-Saraḥsī³⁷, explicitera la nature de l'interdit. Il insiste sur la nature commune des deux orifices (vagin, anus) que seul un interdit juridique peut opposer : « Le devant (*al-qubul*) et le derrière (*al-dubur*) sont chacun un organe sexuel (*farğ*) qu'il faut, juridiquement (*ṣar'an*), couvrir avec

³³ Quelques exécutions sont rapportées pour la période umayyade : 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, gouverneur de la Mecque, exécute sept sodomites : quatre hommes mariés sont lapidés, et trois hommes célibataires reçoivent cent coups de fouet chacun. Ici la peine est similaire à celle des relations sexuelles illicites (*zinā*). Par ailleurs, aux VII^e-VIII^e siècles, trois califes umayyades (Marwān b. 'Abd al-Malik, 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz, Hišām b. 'Abd al-Malik) exécutent des sodomites par lapidation. Certaines versions mālikites tardives, à propos de ces exécutions, affirment qu'ils ont, tous, été brûlés comme Ṣuḡā ; voir al-Baḡī, *al-Muntaqā* et Ibn al-'Arabī, *Aḥkām*, p. 438. Outre l'absence de détails quant à l'identité des « coupables », le point commun entre ces jurisprudences est l'imprécision de la procédure qui établit leur culpabilité. Pas plus que celle établie par Abū Bakr, ces jurisprudences ne sont rapportées dans *al-Muwatta'* de Mālik, ni *al-Umm* d'al-Šāfi'i, ni dans les six recueils canoniques. Ibn Ḥazm en conteste l'authenticité (*al-Muḥallā*).

³⁴ Ces traditions sont considérées comme des constructions du *fiqh* (voir Schacht, *Introduction*), d'où l'incertitude quant à la réalité historique des événements évoqués. Pour l'élaboration du statut juridique de l'acte de pénétration anale, *'amal qaum Lūt*, dans l'ensemble des écoles juridiques musulmane, voir l'étude détaillée de Schmitt, « Liwāt » ; pour l'école juridique ḥanafite plus particulièrement, voir aussi K. El-Rouayheb (*Homosexuality*, pp. 111-150).

³⁵ Voir Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā*, XII, pp. 388, 393. Il y critique les premières consultations juridiques et indique clairement que le sodomite est un *fāsiq* et qu'il ne peut être considéré comme un apostat.

³⁶ Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb b. Ibrāhīm (m. 183/ 799) est un disciple de Abū Ḥanīfa. Il est aussi le premier à occuper le poste de Grand Juge (*Qāḍī l-Quḍāt*) au moment de sa création par le calife Ḥārūn al-Rašīd. Sa position est rapportée par al-Saraḥsī, *al-Mabsūṭ*, Beyrouth, Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1993, IX, p. 78.

³⁷ Al-Saraḥsī est un important juriste ḥanafite du XI^e siècle. Il vécut en Transoxiane. Certains de ses écrits juridiques sont restés des textes de référence pour l'école ḥanafite jusqu'au XIX^e siècle. Voir *ET*.

un vêtement. Et chacun des deux est par nature (*ṭab'an*) désiré au point que celui qui ne connaît pas l'interdit juridique (*al-šar'*) ne fait aucune différence entre les deux. Les deux endroits, le devant et le derrière, sont désirés naturellement (*ṭab'an*) parce qu'ils ne sont pas dissemblables pour ce qui est de la chaleur (*al-ḥarāra*) et de la douceur (*al-luyūna*) »³⁸.

Quel que soit le sexe biologique du partenaire sexuel, son orifice est désirable. C'est la constitution organique (moiteur et douceur) qui rend ces orifices (anus et vagin) naturellement désirés³⁹. L'interdit n'est donc que d'ordre juridique (*šar'an*). Il est lié à une réglementation de la sexualité qui trouve sa légitimité non dans une loi originelle qui se réfère à la Nature mais dans une proscription divine⁴⁰. La Nature serait, par conséquent, le désordre que la loi de Dieu vient ordonner.

Un consensus se forme donc à partir de la fin du VIII^e siècle pour sanctionner l'acte du peuple de Lot (sodomie) dans le cadre des relations sexuelles illicites (avec peines fixes ou discrétionnaires), et non pas dans un cadre juridique créé spécifiquement pour les relations sexuelles entre hommes. Cela

³⁸ Traduit par nos soins, al-Sarāḥsī (*Mabsūt*). Cet argumentation n'est pas une spécificité de l'école juridique ḥanafite. Des juristes, comme le šāfi'ite F. al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥṣīl al-Kabīr*, Beyrouth, Dār al-Fikr, 2005, VIII, p. 131, l'utilisent. Mohammed Benkheira, *L'amour*, p. 300, souligne cet argument d'al-Rāzī quand il expose la position du *fiqh* à propos des relations sexuelles entre les hommes et les animaux : « La bestialité remet en question la frontière fondatrice, celle qui sépare l'homme de la bête. Malgré cela, ce crime n'est pas tenu pour aussi grave que le *zinā* ou l'homosexualité ». Soulignant qu'al-Rāzī déclare : « Le châtement a été institué pour réprimer les penchants de l'âme, or elle [l'âme] ne penche pas pour un tel acte », il ajoute : « Autrement dit, si la bestialité n'est pas traitée avec la même sévérité que les crimes sexuels, c'est parce qu'elle se situe hors du champ de la normalité. C'est donc une aberration dont la Loi n'a pas à se soucier beaucoup. Mais si on lit attentivement ce qu'écrit Rāzī, on ne peut alors s'empêcher d'établir un rapport avec le statut de l'homosexualité masculine : celle-ci serait punie sévèrement, car elle constituerait réellement un penchant de l'âme ? S'agit-il de la reconnaissance par le *fiqh* d'une pulsion homosexuelle ? ». Voir aussi la suite de son développement, *L'amour*, pp. 301-305.

³⁹ Pour les *fuqahā'*, le coït anal met en contact la verge avec le *maḥḍī' al-adā* et expose à une souillure à laquelle l'homme répugne « naturellement ». Il n'est évidemment pas question ici d'une « nature » de l'hétérosexualité *versus* contre-nature de l'homosexualité, mais de deux « naturels » qui s'affrontent : le « naturel » de désirer l'anus car chaud et doux donc pénétrable au même titre que le vagin ; le « contre naturel » de désirer l'anus car lieu de souillure (fécale).

⁴⁰ Existe-t-il une similitude entre le *liwāṭ* pratiqué entre hommes et celui entre un homme et une femme ? Incontestablement, répondent les juristes, si le rapport charnel est consommé hors cadre juridique licite. Que le partenaire soit de sexe féminin ou masculin, l'acte de sodomie est puni pareillement ; les juristes ne hiérarchisent pas le délit en fonction du sexe biologique du partenaire sexuel. Mais la sodomie des épouses ou des concubines fait elle l'objet d'un vaste débat, autour d'un tout autre verset coranique que celui qui interdit la sodomie entre hommes. Question qui montre à quel point, juridiquement, la sexualité était déconnectée de l'impératif de procréation (voir notre mémoire de D.E.A. sous la direction de J. Dakhliā : *Le sodomite et l'efféminé dans l'Islam des IX^e-X^e siècles. Statuts juridiques et représentations sociales*, Paris, EHESS, 2005, pp. 37-43. Voir Aussi K. El-Rouayheb, *Homosexuality*, p. 123).

procure une double assurance au sodomite. D'une part, la garantie d'une procédure explicite pour dénoncer l'acte de pénétration (quatre témoins musulmans, majeurs, libres et intègres). D'autre part, la non application de la peine de mort pour ceux dont les actes ne peuvent être établis par des témoins : toute accusation ou insulte qui ne s'appuie pas sur quatre témoins est punie comme calomnie (quatre-vingts coups de fouet). De la sorte, il devient quasi impossible de faire exécuter un sodomite sur simple dénonciation. D'une manière implicite, la peine de mort est écartée⁴¹.

1.2 *L'insoumis (fāsiq), la désobéissance et l'ordre public*

Les juristes justifient les sanctions contre la sodomie principalement en évoquant la désobéissance (*ʿiṣyān*) et son corollaire, l'insoumission (*fisq*). Leur position est claire : le sodomite (*lūṭī*) ne peut être accusé d'apostasie. Il s'agit seulement d'un musulman qui désobéit à l'une des proscriptions de Dieu (comme celles de la consommation du vin, des relations sexuelles illicites, de l'irrégularité des prières, etc.) : un insoumis (*fāsiq*). Faut-il voir dans l'approche des juristes la seule volonté, pragmatique, de préserver la paix sociale, d'éviter les conflits et les risques de dissension ? Quelle est leur volonté : prévenir et punir des actes sexuels entre personnes de même sexe, ou prévenir et punir la publicité de ces pratiques ? L'analyse du concept d'insoumission nous donnera une première indication. Nous verrons ensuite ce qu'il faut comprendre de l'analogie juridique entre la sodomie et la sexualité licite.

⁴¹ Du fait de l'impossibilité d'appliquer des peines fixes, l'ensemble des écoles juridiques appliquaient possiblement des peines discrétionnaires pour les actes charnels entre hommes, sous la dénomination *mubāṣara*, et non pas *'amal qawm Lūṭ* (ces actes ne nécessitent que deux témoins). La *mubāṣara*, terme non défini avec précision dans les livres du *fiqh*, est souvent utilisée pour désigner deux personnes ayant des relations charnelles sans préjuger de la pénétration (cela peut aussi désigner une caresse, un baiser, ou même le simple regard avec désir). D'un point de vue juridique, dans le cadre de la sexualité illicite, cela concerne probablement tout couple illicite surpris dans une situation suspecte (dans un lieu isolé et sans vêtements par exemple ; deux personnes de même sexe surpris, nus, sous la même couverture ; deux personnes pratiquant le coït intercrural, *taḥḥid*, etc.) sans que l'on puisse prouver juridiquement la pénétration (défaut des quatre témoins, refus d'aveux, etc.). Toutefois, C'est une question qui n'est pas détaillée dans les livres du *fiqh*, et pour en circonscrire le sens et le cadre d'application cela nécessite une véritable étude. Par ailleurs, nous ne disposons pas d'archives de l'administration judiciaire de cette époque, et nous ne connaissons ni la fréquence ni la manière dont étaient mises en oeuvre les punitions des délits concernant la sexualité entre hommes. Signalons néanmoins un article récent de Christian Müller, « L'assassinat du savant Abū Marwān al-Ṭubnī : drame familial et judiciaire », *Al-Qanṭara*, 2 (2005), pp. 425-448. Il y reconstitue l'enquête menée par les autorités policières, ainsi que les discussions des juristes mālikites sur les peines à infliger dans le Cordoue du XI^e siècle. Il est vrai que le délit n'est pas d'ordre sexuel, mais cette étude de cas constitue cependant une indication sur la manière dont le doute peut profiter aux accusées dans le cadre d'un délit qui relève de la peine fixe.

1.2.1. Le concept d'insoumission (fisq)

Définition du *fisq*

Le *fisq* a un sens composite bien plus large qu'une dimension simplement morale. Si les ouvrages du *fiqh* ne définissent pas le sens de ce concept mais se contentent d'aborder le statut du *fāsiq*⁴² dans plusieurs rubriques des *uṣūl* et des *furū*⁴³, chez les exégètes du Coran, en revanche, le sens est plus explicite.

Le *fisq* dans l'exégèse du Coran.

C'est au fait de déborder une limite spatiale qu'al-Ṭabarī attribue l'origine du mot *fisq*. Les Arabes, souligne-t-il, désignent le fait d'outrepasser une limite (*ḥurūḡ 'an al-ṣay*) par *fasaqa*, c'est la raison pour laquelle la souris est qualifiée de *fuwaysqa* : elle sort de son espace propre, terrier (*ḡuḥr*), pour aller gâter les affaires des gens. Par analogie, poursuit al-Ṭabarī, le dissimulateur (*munāfiq*) ou l'infidèle (*kāfir*) ont été appelés *fāsiqūn*, car ils ont transgressés les limites posées par Dieu en refusant de lui obéir (*li-ḥurūḡihimā 'an ṭā'at Allāh*)⁴⁴. Par ailleurs, le terme de *fisq* est souvent associé à un autre terme : *fāhiṣā*⁴⁵. Selon al-Ṭabarī (*Ġāmi'*, IV, p. 85) *fāhiṣa* désigne l'acte laid (*fī la qabiḥa*), qui transgresse ce que Dieu interdit. Il précise l'origine du *fuhṣ* : la laideur (*qubḥ*) est liée au fait d'outrepasser les limites et la mesure (*ḥurūḡ 'an al-ḥadd wa-l-miqdār*) dans toute chose, et peut ainsi qualifier quelqu'un qui est trop grand : *fāhiṣ al-ṭūl* : sa taille est « laide » parce qu'elle a dépassé la mesure convenue (*ḥaraḡa 'an al-miqdār al-mustaḥsan*). Ainsi la « laideur » d'une *fāhiṣa* n'est pas seulement liée à l'acte en soi, mais aussi à son caractère excessif (*al-ḥurūḡ 'an al-miqdār al-mustaḥsan*). Notons enfin qu'aucun de ces termes – *fāhiṣa* et *fisq* – n'est spécifique à la sexualité en particulier (acte de sodomie, adultère, fornication) ;

⁴² L'hésitation des exégètes quand au statut du *fāsiq* est en partie liée au fait que le terme *fāsiqūn* désigne, dans le Coran, aussi bien les polythéistes que les croyants. Des exégètes voient là une indication pour considérer tout musulman qui n'applique pas l'ensemble des prescriptions de Dieu comme un apostat (*kāfir*), position qui ne sera pas suivie. Un consensus (*iḡmā'*) s'établira : la principale différence entre un musulman et un infidèle ne sera pas liée au respect des actes (prescrits ou pros crits), mais à la proclamation de la foi en l'existence de Dieu ; tant que la foi n'a pas été abjurée publiquement, et quels que soient les actes commis, le *fāsiq* sera traité et jugé en tant que musulman. Voir notamment le résumé de Gardet, « Fāsiḳ ».

⁴³ Voir les discussions dans les livres de *fiqh* quant à la valeur du témoignage d'un *fāsiq* (un témoin *fāsiq* doit-il être disqualifié du fait qu'il ne serait pas 'adl ?), quant à la validité du jugement d'un juge *fāsiq* ou quant à la prière conduite par un *fāsiq*, etc.

⁴⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ġāmi'*, I, pp. 182-183.

⁴⁵ Les deux termes qualifient aussi bien des actes punis par des peines fixes (*ḥadd*), comme les actes sexuels illicites, la consommation de vin, le banditisme, le vol, que des actes que Dieu menace de châtier le jour du Jugement et dont il n'a pas fixé de peine (la duplicité (*nifāq*), désobéir à ses parents ('*uqūq*), etc.)

ils qualifient tous les actes de transgression (consommation du vin, vol, diffamation, *qadḥ*, etc.), quelle qu'en soit la nature.

Dans l'ensemble des commentaires regroupés par al-Ṭabarī, l'élément mis en avant dans la qualification de *fāsiq* est la rébellion (*ʿiṣyān*) contre les obligations prescrites à celui qui a proclamé sa croyance en Dieu (*ʿahd Allāh*). Cette désobéissance (*ḥurūḡ ʿan al-ṭāʾa*) constitue une transgression de limites préalablement fixées⁴⁶.

Le *fisq* est donc la rébellion contre l'ordre de Dieu, par le fait de commettre des actes qu'il a proscrits (*ḥurūḡ ʿan amr Allāh wa-ṭāʾatihi ilā mā nahā ʿanhu wa-zaḡara wa-ilā mā ʿṣiyatihi*)⁴⁷. Mais *fisq* comme *fāḥiṣa* désignent la transgression d'une limite convenue, et non d'une limite absolue⁴⁸. La portée de la transgression et la nature de la peine peuvent faire l'objet d'un débat.

Al-Saraḥsī nous aide à mieux circonscrire le sens juridique du *fisq* quand il l'utilise pour désigner les actes de non-musulmans. Si des non musulmans protégés (*ḍimmī*) vendent publiquement du vin ou de la viande de porc, ils commettent selon lui un acte de *fisq*, car vendre ces produits d'une manière ostentatoire signifie un manque de considération pour la loi musulmane et une rupture du pacte signé avec eux⁴⁹. Ainsi, selon al-Saraḥsī, ce n'est pas tant l'acte de vendre du vin ou du porc (qualifié de *fisq*) qui est en question, mais le caractère ostentatoire de la vente. Ce caractère ostentatoire implique une transgression des limites contractuelle, donc une insoumission. En général, les juristes n'insistent pas sur la dimension morale des actes⁵⁰.

Définition de l'espace autorisé

Ainsi la question de l'interdit associé au dépassement des limites fonde-t-elle la réflexion des juristes. Elle se retrouve explicitée notamment dans leur

⁴⁶ Muḡāhid b. Ḡabral-Maḥzūmī, *Tafsīr Muḡāhid*, éd. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sūrtī, Beyrouth, al-Manṣūrāt al-ʿilmiyya, I, p. 102.

⁴⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ġāmiʿ*, VI, p. 78.

⁴⁸ Soulignons l'absence ou la rareté d'arguments qui prohibent les actes en tant que mauvais en soi. Les actes sont d'abord envisagés dans leur relation avec un espace ou une limite convenue. Seule la préservation de l'ordre social implique certaines proscriptions. D'où la possibilité, pour les juristes et les exégètes de cette époque, d'envisager, au Paradis, l'accomplissement d'actes liés à la *ṣahwa* (désir charnel, envie de consommer du vin, etc.). Voir, à propos de l'utilisation sexuelle des éphèbes (*wildān*) au Paradis, Rouayheb, *Homosexuality*, pp. 128-136.

⁴⁹ Al-Saraḥsī, *Ṣarḥ Kitāb al-Siyar al-kabīr li-l-Ṣaybānī*, Le Caire, éd. Ġāmiʿat al-Duwal al-ʿArabiyya, IV, p. 487. Nous avons consulté le livre sur le site al-Warrāq (<http://www.alwaraq.net/index2.htm?i=75&page=1>).

⁵⁰ Arno Schmitt (« Liwāt », p. 55) remarque que même un moraliste comme al-Ġazālī ne met pas sur le même plan l'acte de sodomie et le le désir pour un jeune homme sans consommation. al-Ġazālī condamne par ailleurs moins sévèrement ce désir s'il s'exprime par le regard ou par le toucher.

manière d'envisager le vol. Selon que le voleur a pénétré un espace autorisé ou non autorisé, la peine encourue (amputation de la main) variera. Les juristes considèrent en effet que l'amputation de la main du voleur punit d'abord la violation d'un espace interdit. Le vol d'un objet subtilisé par un proche (parent, domestique, ou ami), donc autorisé à évoluer dans un espace donné, ne tombe pas sous le coup de la peine fixe (l'amputation). Dans ce cas précis, la responsabilité incombe d'abord au maître des lieux: il n'a pas fait preuve de discernement, puisqu'il a non seulement autorisé le voleur à approcher ses biens, mais l'a induit en tentation en ne mettant pas ceux-ci sous clef⁵¹.

Selon cette approche, ce n'est pas tant le vol qui est puni par la peine fixe (*ḥadd*), mais le vol dans le cadre de la violation d'une limite: l'espace dont l'accès est soumis à autorisation. Poussant donc ce raisonnement jusqu'au bout, certains juristes déconseillent l'amputation de la main pour un vol à l'arraché perpétré dans un lieu public: le voleur n'a violé aucun espace non autorisé⁵². Ainsi, la peine fixe (*ḥadd*) ne sanctionne pas spécifiquement un acte, mais un acte aggravé par la transgression d'une limite, notamment spatiale. La même nuance existe entre la sanction des délits commis en terre d'Islam (*dār al-islām*) et ceux commis à l'étranger (*dār al-ḥarb*): de même que pour le vol, l'un des axes de réflexion des juristes est la limite spatiale comme élément déterminant pour évaluer l'échelle de nuisance⁵³.

Les témoins pour constituer un délit

C'est à cette organisation de l'espace que s'articule la règle des quatre témoins nécessaires à la preuve d'un acte sexuel illicite (fornication ou sodomie). Une telle exigence a-t-elle, en effet, seulement pour vocation de rendre le constat encore plus difficile?

De fait, C'est la grande majorité des personnes susceptibles d'évoluer dans un espace privé qui se trouve d'emblée disqualifiée en tant que témoins. En effet, ceux-ci (obligatoirement mâles, majeurs, libres, musulmans, intègres) ne doivent pas être en situation de tirer un bénéfice de l'exécution de l'un des coupables⁵⁴.

⁵¹ Mālik (m. 179/796), *al-Muwatta'*, éd. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Bāqī, Beyrouth, Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, s.d., pp. 526-527; al-Šāfi'i, *Umm*, VI, p. 151.

⁵² Mālik, *al-Muwatta'*.

⁵³ Les juristes considèrent un espace comme musulman si la loi musulmane s'y applique. Voir al-Šāfi'i, *Umm*, VIII, pp. 354-355) et al-Saraḥsī, *Šarḥ*, IX, p. 38. Par ailleurs, la réflexion autour du lien entre l'acte et l'espace où il se déroule n'est pas une spécificité ḥanafite ou mālikite, elle est posée dans toutes les écoles juridiques. Joseph Schacht, *Introduction*, p. 165, souligne que: «Le droit musulman ne prétend pas à une valeur universelle; il est contraignant dans sa totalité pour les Musulmans sur les territoires des États islamiques, dans une moindre mesure en territoire infidèle et, pour les non Musulmans, seulement en territoire islamique et dans une mesure très limitée»

⁵⁴ Ḥālid al-'Akk, *Mawsū'at al-Fiqh al-mālikī*, Damas, Dār al-Ḥikma, 1993, IV, pp. 67-71.

Se trouvent ainsi disqualifiés : les femmes libres (épouses ou parentes) ; les hommes libres susceptibles d'hériter ou de remplacer le condamné dans l'une des charges qu'il occupe (les parents, les ennemis ou les rivaux déclarés) ; les esclaves (y compris ceux potentiellement amants) ; les enfants mineurs, ou majeurs si héritiers. Ces quatre témoins deviennent, de fait, très improbables, quasi impossibles à réunir, d'autant plus que les musulmans libres peuvent difficilement circuler dans un espace privé sans s'annoncer ; ils courraient alors le risque de violer justement cet espace soumis à autorisation préalable.

Il semble bien qu'en liant la sanction des actes à l'espace où ils sont commis, les juristes cherchent principalement à évaluer le trouble commis, que la sanction a pour fonction de prévenir⁵⁵.

C'est donc comme enjeu d'ordre public que la sodomie est précisément réglementée. Aussi doit-on s'attendre à ce que la sexualité dans son ensemble fasse elle aussi l'objet d'une réglementation détaillée.

1.2.2. *Sexualité et ordre public*

Ce sont en premier chef les relations sexuelles entre un homme et une femme qui feront l'objet d'une étude précise par les juristes. Le corpus validé par les traditionnistes (les hadiths et les jurisprudences établies par le Prophète à propos de la fornication) constitue l'un des modèles à partir duquel les juristes développent leur raisonnement. Et l'un de nos premiers constats, à propos de la plupart des cas de fornication jugés à Médine au VII^e siècle, est la réticence du Prophète à punir les fautifs. Trois cas l'illustrent⁵⁶.

Le premier cas concerne Mā'iz b. Mālik, le fornicateur : Mā'iz b. Mālik interpelle le Prophète dans la mosquée. Il lui annonce par quatre fois qu'il a forniqué et lui demande de le purifier. À chaque fois, le Prophète détourne la tête et fait semblant de ne pas avoir entendu l'aveu. Mais à la quatrième sermon, le Prophète questionne Mā'iz sur le sens du *zinā* : « Peut-être as-tu seulement embrassé ou caressé ? ». Mā'iz refuse de se rétracter. Le Prophète interroge ensuite ses proches sur sa santé mentale et son statut matrimonial. Ils répondent qu'il est sain d'esprit et qu'il n'est pas célibataire. Le Prophète ordonne alors de le faire lapider⁵⁷. À une autre occasion – deuxième cas –, une

⁵⁵ Cette approche transparaît aussi dans le statut juridique de l'esclave. Fornicateur ou sodomite, et quel que soit son statut matrimonial, il est exempté de la peine de mort et ne reçoit que cinquante coups de fouet, en lieu et place des cent coups prévus pour l'homme libre. C'est qu'il ne s'agit pas de pénaliser financièrement son maître, dans la mesure où l'insoumission d'un esclave est moins importante pour l'ordre public que la perte financière que représenterait sa mort. Les juristes laissent à leurs maîtres le soin de corriger ceux-ci.

⁵⁶ Cités par Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, IV, pp. 573, 590, Mālik, *al-Muwatta'*, pp. 414-416 et Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 29, *Ḥudūd*, 22, III, pp. 1322-1323. Ces hadiths sont validés par l'ensemble des écoles juridiques.

⁵⁷ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 29, *Ḥudūd*, 20, III, p. 1320, traduit par nos soins.

femme, al-Ġāmidīyya, interpelle le Prophète et lui demande de la purifier⁵⁸. Il lui répond : « Invoque la miséricorde de Dieu et repens-toi auprès de lui (*istağfirī bi-llāh wa-tūbī ilayhi*) ». Elle n'en a cure et insiste : « Vous voulez m'obliger à revenir comme Mā'iz. Or je suis enceinte. C'est le fruit de la fornication. » Le Prophète lui recommande d'attendre jusqu'à l'accouchement et de revenir. Après celui-ci, elle renouvelle son interpellation. Il lui recommande d'allaiter son enfant et de revenir une fois qu'il aura été sevré. À son troisième retour, le Prophète hésite encore à lui appliquer la peine ; il lui ordonne de trouver un tuteur à son fils. Quand elle l'interpelle une quatrième fois, il la fait lapider⁵⁹. Apparaît clairement le point commun entre ces deux récits, validés par la tradition et le droit (*fiqh*) : la réticence du Prophète à entendre l'aveu des fautifs ; une réticence active, puisqu'il tente de les dissuader de persister dans leur aveu, et leur recommande de cacher leur forfait (*yastatir bi-satr Allāh*).

Cette réticence est encore plus explicite dans un autre cas de fornication. Un autre homme – notre troisième cas – avoue au Prophète qu'il a eu des relations sexuelles illicites avec une femme. Le Prophète ordonne qu'il soit fouetté et prévient que les musulmans doivent éviter d'enfreindre les interdits de Dieu ; mais si quelqu'un faillit, ajoute-t-il, il faut qu'il le cache (*yastatir bi-satr Allāh*). Autrement, s'il avoue : « Je lui ferai subir la sanction prévue à cet effet »⁶⁰. Ainsi, l'attitude du Prophète traduit clairement que l'acte en soi importe moins que ses conséquences. Ce n'est pas le délit effectif qui fait agir le Prophète, puisqu'il est disposé à faire semblant de n'avoir rien entendu. C'est l'aveu public et répété, associé à l'acte, qui constitue la violation d'une limite.

De même, le soupçon qui a pesé sur la fidélité de 'Ā'īša, l'épouse préférée du Prophète, éclaire l'approche du Prophète sous un autre angle. Le Prophète refuse d'y ajouter foi et de la condamner. Il hésite durant plusieurs semaines : son entêtement provoque les rumeurs. Le Prophète n'a donc que deux solutions pour ramener le calme : la séparation qu'il refuse d'envisager ou un signe de Dieu pour innocenter 'Ā'īša. C'est alors que lui sont inspirés les versets relatifs à l'accusation sans preuve des femmes vertueuses, qui innocentent

⁵⁸ Notons que la notion de purification (*tathīr*) par la sanction n'implique pas une sacralisation de la sexualité. La purification par la punition concerne tous les délits qui relèvent des peines fixées par Dieu (*hudūd*) sans distinction de catégorie (vol, alcool, sexualité illicite, banditisme, etc.). C'est la désobéissance à Dieu qui est punie (la punition purifie et octroie le pardon de Dieu). C'est elle seule qui motive la peine (al-Šāfi'i, *Umm*, VI, p. 138).

⁵⁹ Traduit par nos soins, al-Šāfi'i, *Umm*, II, p. 1323.

⁶⁰ Mālik, *al-Muwatta'*, p. 518.

‘Ā’iṣā⁶¹. Or, ces versets indiquent clairement, que juridiquement, un acte sans témoin et sans aveu est un acte qui n’a pas eu lieu⁶².

1.2.3. *La discrétion: un fondement de l’ordre public?*

C’est donc la menace que fait peser sur son autorité l’aveu répété impuni ou l’accusation non démentie qui fait réagir le Prophète. En dehors de cette circonstance, il est disposé à ignorer le délit. L’acte en soi, seul, n’est pas suffisant: ce qui importe est sa publicité, et les conséquences de celles-ci. Aussi, lorsque al-Saraḥsī, au XI^e siècle, théorise les peines fixes (*ḥudūd*), il rappelle qu’elles ont été instituées pour prévenir le désordre (*fitna*). C’est la principale raison pour laquelle tous les délits qui n’en sont pas source ont été exemptés; ils ne sont punis que d’une peine discrétionnaire. À propos d’un autre délit, l’apostasie des femmes par exemple, al-Saraḥsī ajustera la punition en fonction du degré de nuisance: les coupables ne doivent pas encourir la peine fixe prévue à cet effet (la mort) du fait que le désordre causé par leur acte est beaucoup moins grave que celui qui est causé par un homme libre. Il recommande une peine discrétionnairement fixée par le juge⁶³.

C’est, peut être, grâce à l’analyse du terme *fiṣq* (insoumission) comme violation des limites convenues que les juristes justifient leurs avis dans un cadre légal plutôt que moral: il s’agit de l’insoumission à Dieu par la désobéissance à l’un des interdits énoncés dans le Coran ou le Hadith. Cette catégorie comprend aussi bien le fornicateur et le sodomite, que le voleur et le buveur de vin⁶⁴. Mais l’insoumis demeure un musulman qui, s’il désobéit à l’une des

⁶¹ Traduit par nos soins. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, III, pp. 2129-2138.

⁶² Joseph Schacht, *Introduction*, p. 161, souligne que « Le droit islamique de procédure n’in- siste pas tant sur la détermination d’une vérité objective que sur l’application d’une règle for- melle ». Notons que Rowson « Categorization », p. 61, affirme en note, sans préciser ses références, que le *zinā*, parce que difficile à prouver, devait se régler souvent par une justice sommaire exé- cutée par les parents et les maris. De tels postulats sont problématiques. Si en effet dans certaines sociétés arabes contemporaines les questions du *zinā* et de l’honneur se règlent souvent par une justice sommaire, pour les sociétés médiévales une telle affirmation est moins évidente et mérite- rait une étude plus précise.

⁶³ Voir al-Saraḥsī, *Šarḥ*: les raisons pour lesquelles les *ḥudūd* ont été établis, ainsi que la justification de la règle des quatre témoins (IX, pp. 36, 37, 38); la différence entre *zinā* et *‘amal qaum Lūt* (IX, pp. 78, 79); l’apostasie des femmes (X, p. 108). La principale différence entre peines fixes et peines discrétionnaires est d’ordre symbolique: l’une relève de la justice de Dieu, l’autre de celle des hommes; les peines fixes purifient le fautif qui n’est plus comptable de ses méfaits devant Dieu; les peines discrétionnaires ne punissent que les actes jugés néfastes par les hommes. En fonction des juristes, des écoles juridiques et des époques, les peines discrétionnaires sont d’ailleurs parfois aussi lourdes que les peines fixes. Par ailleurs, seuls les ḥanafites poussent le raisonnement aussi loin à propos du degré de nuisance, en dispensant les femmes de la peine de mort en cas d’apostasie.

⁶⁴ Al-Saraḥsī, *Šarḥ*, X, p. 108.

prescriptions, n'encourt pas pour autant systématiquement une sanction légale⁶⁵.

Ils tentent ensuite de proportionner la sanction en fonction de la nuisance des actes, évaluée en lien avec l'espace où le délit est commis. La réticence des juristes à intervenir dans l'espace privé ne doit pas être envisagée comme une volonté d'octroyer un espace de liberté aux musulmans. Une telle approche est étrangère aux préoccupations de cette époque; en évitant d'intervenir dans un espace privé, ils ne laissent pas cet espace sans règles: ils ne font que déléguer le soin de faire respecter les limites au chef de l'espace privé en question. Cela implique-t-il que le chef de la maison dispose de suffisamment de latitude et d'impunité pour pratiquer lui-même la sexualité qu'il désire? Quoi qu'il en soit, cette liberté n'est pas étendue à ceux qui se trouvent sous sa responsabilité, et dont il a le devoir de surveiller les actes. De ce fait, l'espace privé n'échappe pas vraiment aux normes édictées. Si les juristes, ou l'autorité, sont responsables de l'ordre public, chaque espace privé est sous la responsabilité de son maître⁶⁶.

Ainsi, dans un espace privé ou public, le sodomite demeure un insoumis (*fāsiq*) dont la désobéissance est sanctionnée d'une manière proportionnée à la nuisance causée par ses actes, et notamment à leur publicité.

Il est par ailleurs important de souligner que la difficulté de mettre en oeuvre l'application de la peine de mort ne signifie pas nécessairement une volonté de la part des juristes de créer des lois pour qu'elles ne soient pas appliquées. Mais plutôt qu'il existe un cadre précis à leur application, ce cadre n'étant pas lié au seul acte sexuel illicite, mais à la violation d'une limite spatiale ou contractuelle. Seule la conjonction des deux permet la mise en application de la peine fixe.

1.3 Sexualité et masculinité

Nous avons vu que la sexualité, pour les juristes, est considérée dans sa dimension sociale. La justification de la punition du sodomite, contrairement à ce qu'elle sera à l'époque contemporaine, ne s'appesantit pas sur la nature de la sexualité pratiquée, mais s'intéresse seulement au désordre créé par sa publicité. Pour comprendre cette approche, il est nécessaire d'interroger maintenant la place de la sexualité dans la détermination des genres sexuels (masculinité et féminité), notamment par l'analyse du lien entre filiation biologique, sexua-

⁶⁵ Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā*, XII, p. 393, après avoir évoqué l'ensemble des polémiques sur cette question, affirme en conclusion que le *fāsiq* est un musulman.

⁶⁶ Al-Sarāḥī, *Šarḥ*, IX, p. 82.

lité, et par l'attribution juridique aux hommes de l'autorité dans le cadre du mariage (*'iṣmat al-nikāḥ*).

Autorité, filiation et sexualité

Pour les juristes musulmans, l'autorité (*'iṣmat al-nikāḥ*) est octroyée exclusivement aux hommes. Une femme est perpétuellement sous la tutelle d'un homme (parent, époux, ou tuteur désigné par les autorités), tutelle qui peut faire l'objet d'un transfert dans le cadre du mariage; l'argumentaire sur lequel celui-ci se fonde éclaire un aspect intéressant de la masculinité à l'époque médiévale: l'importance octroyée par les juristes à l'acte sexuel dans la caractérisation de la masculinité.

Les points de vue sont en effet partagés à propos des relations charnelles entre époux dans le cadre du mariage. Al-Saraḥṣī résume assez bien les points d'accord et de divergence entre juristes de différentes écoles. Le mariage, précise-t-il, a deux objectifs: prévenir le désordre, en encadrant juridiquement la sexualité, et favoriser la procréation. C'est précisément la raison pour laquelle le contrat juridique a lieu entre un homme et une femme, et que l'une des conditions de sa confirmation étant la publicité qui en est faite. Le mariage secret est prohibé, en sorte de différencier le mariage régulier «de la fornication (*zinā*) qui, elle, requiert le secret»⁶⁷. Al-Saraḥṣī énonce ensuite plusieurs autres conditions validant le contrat de mariage (*'aqd al-nikāḥ*)⁶⁸: notamment l'équivalence du statut social (*musāwāt*) entre les deux époux. La considération du statut social (la liberté, la religion, le niveau de richesse) précède en effet tout ce qui s'énonce autour du corps (être sain d'esprit, pubère, de sexes opposés, et disposer d'organes sexuels, *āla*)⁶⁹.

Une fois les principes généraux énoncés, al-Saraḥṣī en vient à la définition de l'acte sexuel (*waṭ'*) validant le contrat de mariage. Précisant auparavant son caractère obligatoire, l'auteur évoque les différentes traditions casuistiques. En

⁶⁷ Traduit par nos soins, al-Saraḥṣī, *al-Mabsūṭ*, IV, p. 193. Sur la question des conditions nécessaires à la validation de l'acte de mariage, nous citons al-Saraḥṣī. Ces questionnements ne sont pas néanmoins une spécificité de l'école juridique ḥanafite. Sur ce point, les quatre principales écoles juridiques sunnites adoptent la même position. Si par ailleurs le mariage constitue un devoir religieux dans les sociétés musulmanes contemporaines, comme l'affirme, d'après des hadiths de Muslim et al-Buḥārī, A. Bouhdiba, *La sexualité en Islam*, Paris, PUF («Quadrige»), 2001 (1^{ère} éd. 1975), pp. 110-113. Pour la période qui est ici envisagée la question de l'obligation n'est absolument pas tranchée: voir al-Saraḥṣī, *al-Mabsūṭ*, Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā*, IX, pp. 3-12, et Ibn Ruṣd, *Bidāyat al-Muḡtabid wa-nihāyat al-muḡtaṣid*, Beyrouth, Dār al-fikr, s.d., II, p. 2. C'est un acte ou recommandé ou souhaitable ou nécessaire, etc.

⁶⁸ Validation nécessaire non seulement pour la vie familiale mais aussi le statut social et juridique du musulman: seul un contrat de mariage validé octroie *al-iḥṣān*, en cette qualité, un homme devient passible de la peine de mort en cas de relations sexuelles illicites.

⁶⁹ Al-Saraḥṣī, *al-Mabsūṭ*, V, pp. 147-150.

effet, plusieurs traditions s'opposent : une première considère que le simple isolement dans un lieu voilé (*irḥā' al-sutūr*) d'un homme et de son épouse entraîne la validation du mariage. Ce courant légitime sa position par les versets recommandant le voile. L'interdit, selon eux, comprend l'isolement : une personne pubère, libre, de sexe féminin n'est autorisée à s'isoler et à se découvrir auprès d'un étranger pubère de condition libre que si elle en est l'épouse. L'isolement du couple, de fait, aurait ainsi valeur d'acte charnel et validerait, par conséquent, le contrat de mariage (*'aqd al-nikāḥ*). Une autre tradition n'accepte pas cet argument et exige qu'il y ait eu au moins un attouchement (caresse, baiser, etc.). Les juristes citent cette fois les hadiths qui interdisent toute alliance matrimoniale avec les ascendants ou les descendants d'une femme, quand celle-ci a été touchée avec désir par le prétendant en question⁷⁰. Ces deux courants d'interprétation ne considèrent donc pas l'acte sexuel intégral. Pour eux, une fois la question de l'équivalence du statut social obtenue (liberté et religion musulmane), seules des considérations secondaires interviennent dans la validation du contrat de mariage : isolement pour les premiers, simple attouchement pour les autres, autant de manière de se comporter socialement jugées plus significatives qu'un rapport sexuel.

Mais une troisième tradition juridique assure que la pénétration de l'organe viril dans l'orifice du devant de l'épouse est obligatoire. Elle recommande la pénétration en référence (*qiyās*) aux actes sexuels avec pénétration qui invalident certaines prescriptions de Dieu (purification avant la prière, jeûne du ramadan), ou qui sont punis par la loi (la fornication). Et c'est finalement cette tradition juridique qui réunira la plus grande adhésion : l'acte charnel qui valide un mariage devra mettre en œuvre la pénétration⁷¹.

Toutefois, les juristes précisent que l'éjaculation n'est pas indispensable. Une simple pénétration de la partie supérieure du membre viril (*ḥaṣāfa*) suffit. Certains ajoutent que même si le pénis n'est pas en érection, et même s'il est nécessaire que la femme ou l'homme s'aident de leurs mains pour le faire entrer dans l'orifice, la pénétration est proclamée suffisante pour valider le mariage et transférer l'autorité (*iṣmat al-nikāḥ*) du tuteur légal à l'époux. Ils concluent qu'une pénétration avec la totalité de l'organe viril n'est pas obligatoire : le gland suffit. Par ailleurs, dans le cas où le gland est coupé, s'il reste du membre viril une longueur équivalente à celle, habituelle, d'un gland, elle doit être considérée comme suffisante pour valider la pénétration. Une tradition, marginale et minoritaire, ira jusqu'à assurer que même si la totalité de l'organe

⁷⁰ Al-Saraḥsī, *al-Mabsūt*, V, pp. 148-149.

⁷¹ Pour cette discussion, outre Al-Saraḥsī (*al-Mabsūt*), voir Mālik, *al-Muwatta'*, p. 342, et al-Šāfi'i, *Umm*, VII, pp. 233-234.

sexuel de l'homme est coupée, s'il frotte son emplacement contre le sexe féminin (*siḥāq*), cela constitue un rapport sexuel validant le mariage⁷².

Ainsi, les juristes de la plupart des écoles juridiques n'accordent pas une place centrale à l'acte sexuel *achevé* dans la perspective de la pénétration. Il n'est pas indispensable. Si le statut social est satisfaisant, le sexe biologique d'un homme suffit à lui seul à valider le mariage. Ne serait-ce pas le signe que l'acte sexuel n'avait pas l'importance qu'il a acquise aujourd'hui dans les textes réglementant le mariage⁷³?

L'époux « trompé », la filiation, la sexualité

Corrélativement au contrat, d'autres dispositifs réglementent les liens de filiation découlant du mariage, qui distendent encore le lien entre mariage et sexualité. Un cas jurisprudentiel, attribué au Prophète, est particulièrement intéressant : l'époux qui surprend sa compagne avec un autre homme doit-il recourir à trois autres témoins pour rejeter notamment les enfants illégitimes ?

Hilāl b. Umayya approche ainsi le Prophète pour lui demander justice. Il accuse son épouse d'avoir commis l'adultère avec Šarik b. Samḥā'. Le Prophète lui ordonne d'amener trois autres témoins, faute de quoi il lui appliquera la sanction (*ḥadd*) prévue pour ceux qui accusent sans preuve une femme musulmane d'adultère. Mais l'injonction du Prophète est récusée par l'époux « trompé » ; il réitère son accusation et invoque l'aide de Dieu. L'autorité du Prophète est ainsi mise à mal ; de nouveaux versets coraniques expriment alors le point de vue religieux :

⁷² À propos des caractéristiques de la pénétration, voir al-Bāḡī, *al-Muntaqā*, al-Šāfi'ī, *Umm*, V, pp. 30-41. Il ne s'agit pas d'une spécificité particulière à une école juridique, à l'exclusion des autres. Toutes se sont penchées sur cette question et ont validé la nécessité de la pénétration. Un ensemble de jurisprudences ou de propositions appliquées ou discutées jusqu'aux XIV^e-XVI^e siècles notamment par l'école mālikite montre que ces discussions ne relèvent pas seulement de la théorie juridique : voir sur la pénétration sans éjaculation validant l'acte du mariage, Ibn Ḡuzayy, juriste mālikite andalou (m. 693/1293), *al-Qawānīn al-Fiqhiyya*, Beyrouth, Dār al-Qalam, s.d., pp. 140, 233 ; sur la pénétration de celui dont l'organe sexuel est coupé, voir 'Abd al-Barr al-Namari l-Qurṭubī, *Kitāb al-Kāfi*, éd. Muḥammad M. 'Uḥīd, Le Caire, Maṭba'at Ḥassān, 1979, II, p. 364 ; pour les consultations juridiques sur l'isolement dans un lieu voilé (*irḥā' al-sutūr*) validant le mariage, voir Abū 'Abbās Aḥmad al-Wanšarīsī (834/1431-914/1508), *al-Mi'yār al-Mu'rib wa-l-ḡāmi' al-muḡrib 'an fatāwī Ifriqiyya wa-l-Andalus wa-l-Maḡrib*, éd. Muḥammad Ḥiḡḡī, nouvelle édition, Rabat, publication du Ministère des Waqfs et des affaires religieuses, 1981, IV, pp. 327-334.

⁷³ Le code du statut personnel de certains États arabes, comme par exemple le Maroc, spécifie que l'acte sexuel est indispensable. Il attribue ainsi au mariage un but de procréation ; voir Maurice Borrmans, *Statut personnel et famille au Maghreb de 1940 à nos jours*, Paris, Mouton, 1977, p. 198.

«6. Ceux qui accuseront leurs femmes et qui n'auront d'autres témoins à produire qu'eux-mêmes jureront quatre fois devant Dieu qu'ils disent la vérité. 7. Et la cinquième fois pour invoquer la malédiction de Dieu sur eux s'ils ont menti. 8. On n'infligera aucune peine à la femme si elle jure quatre fois devant Dieu que son mari a menti, 9. Et la cinquième fois, en invoquant la malédiction de Dieu sur elle si ce que le mari a avancé est vrai. 10. Si ce n'était la grâce inépuisable de Dieu et sa miséricorde, Il vous punirait à l'instant ; mais Il aime à pardonner, et Il est miséricordieux. »⁷⁴

Le Prophète convoque alors les deux époux et leur enjoint de jurer chacun à son tour selon les indications des versets révélés. Ensuite, en aparté, à l'intention de ses compagnons, il commente l'événement : à la naissance, la vérité éclatera. La suite donna en effet raison à l'époux « trompé » : le nouveau-né portait des signes physiques de ressemblance qui désignaient incontestablement l'amant comme père. Le Prophète complète alors la procédure par un éclaircissement : « S'il n'y avait pas les règles établies par les versets révélés, je l'aurais punie (*lawlā mā madā min kitāb Allāh la-kāna li wa-lahā šā'n.*) »⁷⁵ Cette procédure est ensuite adoptée dans les livres du droit (*fiqh*) sous le nom de « l'appel à la malédiction » (*li'ān*)⁷⁶. Validée par la tradition, la démarche du Prophète indique d'abord la volonté de préserver la cohérence des lois édictées à propos de l'adultère, mais réaffirme surtout que la matérialité des relations charnelles est moins gênante, moins signifiante que leur discussion publique. Le Prophète confirme ensuite l'autorité de l'époux lésé : celui qui refuse de se taire sur les écarts réels ou fictifs de son épouse conservera la possibilité de rejeter le « bâtard adultérin » ; le mari proclamera que l'enfant n'est pas le sien, et si l'épouse lui rétorque qu'il ment, le mariage sera dissout et l'enfant rattaché à l'ascendance maternelle⁷⁷.

Tout aussi significatif est le hadith concernant l'amant qui revendique la paternité du nouveau-né d'une concubine (*ama*) dont le maître vient à décéder. L'héritier refuse de lui céder l'enfant et proclame qu'il est son frère. Le Prophète abonde dans son sens et ruine les prétentions de l'amant : « L'enfant est pour le détenteur du contrat (*al-firās*) et le débauché n'aura que la déception (*al-walad li-l-firās wa-li-l-āhir al-ḥaḡar*) »⁷⁸. Là encore, la réalité de la

⁷⁴ [Coran 24:6-10], voir *Coran*, trad. Blachère, pp. 321-322.

⁷⁵ Traduit par nos soins. Ibn Māga, *Sunan*, I, p. 668).

⁷⁶ Serment d'anathème du mari affirmant l'adultère de son épouse, et impliquant la dissolution du mariage ainsi qu'un désaveu de paternité. Voir notamment al-Šāfi'i, *Umm*, V, pp. 285-293 ; voir Benkheira, *L'amour*, pp. 293-296.

⁷⁷ Il existe une jurisprudence mālikite rapportée par al-Wanšarīsī sur un cas d'anathème (*li'ān*), à Cordoue au X^e siècle (*Mi'yār*, IV, pp. 76-77).

⁷⁸ Traduit par nos soins, Ibn Māga, *Sunan*, I, p. 647. Ce hadith est habituellement traduit par « l'enfant [appartient] au lit [nuptial] ; et le débauché [n'a droit qu'] aux pierres [lapidation] ».

filiation, et donc d'un rapport sexuel, est secondaire par rapport à la gestion d'un problème d'ordre public.

La filiation dans les consultations juridiques

Qu'elles émanent des Ḥanafites ou des Mālikites, les réponses aux consultations juridiques indiquent sans ambiguïté que l'approche initiée par le Prophète est poursuivie par les juristes. L'un d'eux, un ḥanafite du XII^e siècle, explique la supériorité de la déclaration publique sur les preuves matérielles. Il s'agit d'un couple marié par procuration, et dont l'épouse a eu un enfant sans avoir jamais rencontré son mari. Or le mari proclame que l'enfant est le sien. Al-Kāsānī⁷⁹, auteur de la réponse à la consultation juridique, rappelle alors les objectifs du mariage :

« L'un d'eux est d'établir la filiation (*tubūt al-nasab*) et, même si dans la réalité la descendance est le produit des relations sexuelles, sa preuve apparente est le contrat de mariage (*nikāḥ*), du fait que les relations sexuelles se passent dans l'intimité (*amr bāṭin*). C'est la raison pour laquelle l'acte de mariage remplace la réalité (ou la preuve) des relations sexuelles effectives pour établir la filiation (*nasab*). C'est aussi pour cette raison que le Prophète a affirmé que : "L'enfant est pour le détenteur du contrat (*al-firāṣ*) et le débauché n'aura que la déception (*al-walad li-l-firāṣ wa-li-l-'ahir al-ḥaḡar*)". Ainsi, si un homme vivant en Orient (*maṣriqī*) épouse une femme vivant en Occident (*magribiyya*), et si elle a un enfant, il sera considéré comme l'enfant de son époux, même s'il n'y a pas eu de relations sexuelles effectives, du fait que le contrat constitue une preuve prépondérante (*wa-in lam yūḡad al-duḡul ḥaqīqatan li-wuḡūd sababihi wa-huwa al-nikāḥ* [le contrat de mariage])⁸⁰ »

Nous privilégions l'interprétation de certains juristes, plutôt qu'une traduction littérale (nous nous en expliquons ci-dessous). Pour la seconde partie du hadith, nous avons suivi le commentateur d'al-Qurṭubī (*Tafsīr*, IX, p. 47) : si certains juristes ont interprété *ḥaḡar* comme une allusion à la lapidation, al-Qurṭubī insiste sur la déception (*ḥayba*).

⁷⁹ Al-Kāsānī est un des plus grands juristes de l'école ḥanafite. Il enseigne à Alep jusqu'à son décès en 587/1189. Voir *EP*.

⁸⁰ Traduit par nos soins. Abū Bakr al-Kāsānī (m. 587/1191), *Kitāb Badā'ī al-Ṣanā'ī fī tartīb al-ṣarā'ī*, Beyrouth, Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, II, pp. 331-332. al-Kāsānī explicitera la dissociation implicite (suggérée par *al-walad li-l-firāṣ*...) entre filiation biologique et filiation juridique. *Al-firāṣ*, lit nuptial, renvoie, dans cette perspective, non pas à la présomption d'un acte sexuel (réel ou fictif) se déroulant dans le *firāṣ* [lit nuptial], mais à un contrat juridique qui lie l'homme à ses partenaires féminines (l'épouse, la concubine), contrat qui vaut présomption de l'acte sexuel. Mohammed H. Benkheira le souligne d'une manière différente en analysant les conséquences juridiques de ce hadith : « ... la filiation n'est pas un fait de nature, mais une construction juridique. Il ne suffit pas donc d'être issu des ébats de deux géniteurs pour accéder à l'identité de sujet, il faut naître, une seconde fois dans l'ordre de la Loi » (*L'amour*, pp. 353-354). Voir aussi une partie du chapitre intitulé « Inceste et filiation » (pp. 343-360).

Dans l'Occident musulman (Andalousie et Maghreb), les mālikites utiliseront un autre argument : le fœtus endormi. En effet, l'épouse dont le compagnon s'absente ou meurt peut accoucher d'un enfant dans un délai de cinq années et le prétendre issu de cette union. Les juristes acceptent l'argument d'un fœtus endormi dans l'utérus maternel, à la condition que la mère en fasse la proclamation publique⁸¹. Enfin, la même dialectique est à l'œuvre avec le droit de tout être humain à une ascendance. Si l'adoption reste interdite dans le droit musulman⁸², le descendant peut proclamer publiquement être le fils du parent choisi. L'ascendance est alors considérée comme légitime, si le père désigné ne s'y oppose pas⁸³; là encore, la parole publique (*iqrār*) l'emporte sur une réalité biologique.

Ainsi, ces dispositifs aménagent un cadre où mariage, autorité (*'iṣmat al-nikāḥ*) et filiation sont réglementés sans pourtant être étroitement associés à l'acte sexuel : d'une part, le mariage est subordonné à des considérations principalement sociales, et l'acte charnel n'en constitue pas l'élément central ; d'autre part, le seul fait d'appartenir au genre masculin importe plus que la pratique sexuelle effective dans l'ensemble des processus de légitimation (d'une union, d'une descendance), dont chacun peut choisir d'ignorer la réalité biologique.

Mariage, masculinité et loi naturelle

Les jurisprudences du Prophète, validées par les juristes, n'expliquent pas à elles seules la place secondaire attribuée au fait sexuel. Al-Saraḥsī, bien qu'il voie dans l'origine du mariage la nécessité de perpétuer l'espèce humaine, conforte plutôt notre analyse :

« Dieu a décidé de la continuation du monde jusqu'au jour du Jugement, et c'est par la procréation que la perpétuation est assurée. Habituellement, la procréation n'existe qu'entre un homme et une femme, et cela ne se produit que par l'acte sexuel. C'est pourquoi la loi de Dieu (*al-ṣar'*) a institué le contrat de mariage (*nikāḥ*) pour empêcher : la division (*fasād*) engendrée par les disputes pour dispo-

⁸¹ Al-Wanṣarīsī rapporte plusieurs cas, qui montrent une mise en œuvre répétée de ces dispositions en Occident musulman (*Mi'yār*, IV, pp. 480-481, 492-495, 524-526). De multiples conséquences juridiques découlent de la non prise en compte de l'adultère, dont la possibilité que l'héritier soit un « bâtard ». Cela pose la question de l'importance réelle de la filiation biologique pour les musulmans de cette époque.

⁸² L'adoption est interdite par un verset du Coran : seul le tutorat permet de prendre en charge un enfant abandonné. Cela implique que l'enfant n'est pas plus rattaché à l'ascendance de son tuteur qu'il ne peut constituer un héritier légal (*ṣar'ī*).

⁸³ Cette procédure s'appelle la proclamation publique ou l'aveu (*al-iqrār*). Elle est validée par l'ensemble des écoles juridiques sunnites. Voir al-Saraḥsī, *Mabsūṭ*, XVII, p. 168.

ser des corps des femmes (*tağallub*) ; que la séduction (*iqdām*) sans acte de possession de certains [hommes] n'engendre une confusion dans la filiation, et cela risque d'être la cause de la perte des descendants (*ḍayā' al-nasl*). En effet, les femelles (*ināṭ*) humaines sont dans l'incapacité de gagner de quoi vivre et de pourvoir aux dépenses des enfants. La possession par l'acte de mariage a été instituée pour pallier ces insuffisances et contraindre les hommes à assurer les frais d'entretien et d'éducation de leurs enfants (*fa-ta'ayyana l-mulk tariqan labu ḥattā yu'rafā man yakūnu minhu al-walad fa-tağiba 'alayhi nafaqatuhu li-allā yaḍī'a*)⁸⁴.

C'est donc pour pallier les insuffisances des femmes qu'un cadre juridique astreignant pour l'époux a été créé. Énoncée ainsi, la démarche des juristes s'explique autrement : le mariage est un échange d'ordre économique nécessaire pour l'équilibre de la société humaine. L'élément financier, bien plus ou tout autant que la sexualité (la procréation)⁸⁵, en constitue l'argument décisif. La peur vient moins d'un manque de descendance (Dieu y pourvoit) que de troubles économiques qui porteraient en eux-mêmes les germes de la dislocation de la société humaine.

Pour al-Saraḥsī, la supériorité octroyée par Dieu à l'homme sur la femme constitue la raison pour laquelle le mariage a été créé. À tous les niveaux (ontologique, juridique, moral, physique, etc.) cette supériorité de l'homme « n'est jamais entendue que comme essence et un fait de nature, obéissant à une fin divine. Un attribut qu'une certitude physique assoit, qu'un absolu protège, qu'une tradition exauce de mille manières et que substantialisent du pouvoir et de la jouissance. Aucune revendication politique n'ébrèche cette identité qui se rapporte à la naissance », rappelle justement Nadia Tazi⁸⁶.

Aussi la masculinité n'a pas besoin de la sexualité pour s'affirmer, la pondération et la prédisposition à des activités économiques des hommes, en opposition à l'insatiabilité sexuelle et l'inconséquence féminine⁸⁷, sont autant de

⁸⁴ Traduit par nos soins. Al-Saraḥsī, *Mabsūṭ*, IV, p. 193.

⁸⁵ La procréation dépend principalement de la volonté de Dieu, et la sexualité humaine ne peut la contrarier. Cette approche trouve sa justification dans un hadith souvent cité : questionné sur le retrait sans éjaculation (*al-i'tizāl*), le Prophète aurait affirmé que même si le sperme (*mā'*) donnait une progéniture (*walad*) est « déversé sur un rocher, si Dieu veut créer une vie il en sortira un enfant », al-Haytamī (m. 807), *Mağma' al-Zawā'id wa-manba' al-fawā'id*, Beyrouth, Dār al-Kitāb al-'arabī, 1982, IV, p. 296 (traduit par nos soins) ; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, III, p. 114.

⁸⁶ Nada Tazi, « Le désert perpétuel. Visages de la virilité au Maghreb », *La virilité en Islam = Cahiers intersignes*, 11-12, (printemps 1998), p. 28.

⁸⁷ Les écrits d'al-Ġāḥiẓ montrent la place importante accordée à la maîtrise de soi dans la caractérisation de la masculinité. Ainsi, dans l'une de ses épîtres, al-Ġāḥiẓ explique que la passion (*al-'iṣq*) doit céder le pas à l'amour mesuré (*al-ḥubb*) qui seul constitue « le juste milieu et la perfection. Quant au '*iṣq*', il est un *ḥubb* débordant, excessif ; C'est un trop plein d'amour et donc un amour immoral, puisque la vertu est ce juste milieu », écrit Abdallah Cheikh-Moussa, dans « La négation d'eros ou le '*iṣq*' d'après deux épîtres d'al-Ġāḥiẓ », *Studia Islamica*, LXXII (1990),

qualités « naturelles » qui légitiment l'octroi de l'autorité exclusivement aux hommes⁸⁸ ; à aucun moment la sexualité n'intervient pour caractériser la supériorité de l'homme sur la femme : elle n'est ni essentielle ni nécessaire pour justifier la domination masculine ou caractériser la masculinité des hommes. Bien au contraire, une importante activité sexuelle, l'insatiabilité, est considérée comme un défaut spécifiquement féminin (*ṣahwat al-nisā'*)⁸⁹.

Conclusion

D'une manière générale, la sexualité n'obéit pas plus à l'injonction de la procréation que la sodomie ne représente un problème moral ; la réglementation de la sexualité ne s'inscrit pas dans une perspective visant à instaurer de bonnes mœurs : les sources juridiques le démontrent clairement, où le délit de sodomie ne dispose pas d'un cadre juridique spécifique. C'est un acte qui

p. 74. Al-Ġāhiz, précise Abdallah Cheikh-Moussa, fait de ce sentiment mesuré l'apanage des personnes égales socialement, de sexes opposés, de condition libre. Néanmoins, l'égalité est relative. L'homme viril garde une supériorité sur la femme par la maîtrise qu'il exerce constamment sur ses sentiments et ses désirs ; l'inégalité entre un homme et une femme est par ailleurs insurmontable : « définitive car fondée en nature, leur différence, inscrite dans l'ordre naturel, a pour corollaire la supériorité indiscutable de l'un sur l'autre dans l'ordre social » (*Ibid.*, p. 81). Ainsi, les pratiques sexuelles effectives sont ignorées par al-Ġāhiz aussi bien pour caractériser la masculinité, que pour expliquer la supériorité naturelle de l'homme sur la femme. Voir notre mémoire de D.E.A. (*Sodomite*, pp. 58-62 ; 74-82 ; 83-93).

⁸⁸ À propos de la place de la femme chez les musulmans de l'époque médiévale, F. Mernissi relève que la question du genre est prépondérante sur la sexualité : « Ce n'est pas la sexualité qui est attaquée et avilie mais la femme. Celle-ci est attaquée en tant qu'incarnation et symbole du désordre... ». Elle estime que pour al-Ġazālī, « l'humanité n'est faite que de mâles. Non seulement les femmes sont considérées comme étant en dehors de l'humanité mais, de surcroît, comme une menace pour celle-ci. » (*Sexe, Idéologie, Islam*, Casablanca, Eddif, 1985, pp. 28, 30).

⁸⁹ Ainsi, décrivant les aventures du sodomite Ibn Akṭam (qui, au IX^e siècle, sous le règne du calife abbasside al-Ma'mūn, a occupé la fonction de Grand Juge), al-Ābī conclut qu'il a été soupçonné de pratiquer la sodomie passive à cause de l'excès de son activité sexuelle avec les hommes (*min farṭ liwāṭihi ttuhima bi-l-ubna*). Notons bien que cette catégorie de récits relève de la littérature du *muḡūn*. Cela dit, et au delà du caractère purement formel de cette catégorie d'écrits, nous pensons que ces anecdotes ont aussi un rôle éthique et social dont l'objectif est de souligner les risques liés à l'excès. Dans le cas de Yaḥyā b. Akṭam, ce qui est souligné ce n'est pas seulement la pratique d'une activité sexuelle particulière mais l'excès de cette pratique qui induit la *ubna*. Et nous pensons que si la comparaison entre *ubna* et *ṣahwat al-nisā'* est mise en avant, C'est moins pour souligner la similitude dans le rôle sexuel tenu par un sodomite passif et une femme, mais plus pour illustrer le désordre social que créerait un homme qui serait atteint du même mal que les femmes (l'incapacité à contrôler ses désirs sexuels). Notre hypothèse nécessite une analyse plus précise, dont une mise en relation entre les anecdotes concernant les sodomites et celles, nombreuses, qui caractérisent les femmes par leur insatiabilité sexuelle ; cela éclairera différemment la valeur négative ou positive associée aux rôles sexuels et à l'excès.

relève d'un cadre plus général : l'insoumission à l'une des proscriptions de Dieu. Il rejoint d'autres actes proscrits comme le vol, la consommation du vin, la fornication.

Ainsi, la punition du sodomite (rôle sexuel actif ou passif) s'articule autour de trois considérations : le lieu où l'acte est commis (présence ou non de témoins) ; la revendication de l'acte (l'aveu) ; le statut social du sodomite (homme libre, esclave, non musulman). Ces considérations établissent un lien étroit entre l'acte et la publicité qu'il génère. Ainsi, les juristes sévissent pour éviter le désordre (*fitna*). La sanction s'inscrit dans une perspective de préservation de l'ordre public.

Telle qu'esquissée ici la sexualité illicite (fornication et sodomie), d'un point de vue juridique, échappe donc en grande partie à nos catégories modernes (homosexualité *versus* hétérosexualité). C'est que, dans la pensée médiévale, les identités de genre (masculin, féminin) sont strictement liées au sexe biologique (et non à l'acte sexuel). Masculinité et féminité s'exprimeraient par des qualités et des défauts d'ordres comportementaux que Dieu attribue, par essence, à l'un ou à l'autre sexe ; la pondération pour les hommes et l'excès pour les femmes, par exemple, en constitueraient un principe important. Cela explique-t-il pourquoi les juristes ne chercheront pas à corriger la sexualité du sodomite, compatible avec sa masculinité, mais seulement l'excès de sa sexualité, qui, l'envahissant, menace l'ordre public, et partant l'identité masculine ? Une étude d'une figure autrement scandaleuse, celle de l'efféminé (*muḥannat*) permettrait sans doute de répondre à cette question⁹⁰. De fait, si le sodomite n'est condamné que lorsqu'il envahit l'espace public, et manifeste ainsi une incapacité à contrôler son activité sexuelle, C'est probablement que ce manque de pondération⁹¹, caractéristique de la féminité, transgresse une identité de genre considérée comme naturelle et immuable et menace ainsi les conditions mêmes de la supériorité masculine.

⁹⁰ Le défaut de masculinité de l'efféminé était moins caractérisé par sa sexualité que par son comportement public : gestuelle, habillement, caractéristiques morales (voir Rowson, « Categorization... », p. 70). Par ailleurs, Abdallah Cheikh-Moussa (« Ġāḥiḥ et les eunuques ou la confusion du même et de l'autre », *Arabica*, XXIX/2 (1982), pp. 191, 194) a souligné que la perte de masculinité des castrats n'était pas toujours associée à une défaillance de leur capacité sexuelle qui rivalisait, pour certaines d'entre eux, avec celle des hommes non mutilés.

⁹¹ Mais alors, la même inquiétude serait-elle aussi à l'oeuvre pour le *mizwāḡ*? Le *zānī*?



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FUTUWWA: CHIVALRY AND GANGSTERISM IN MEDIEVAL CAIRO

A *tadhkira* (memorandum) prepared some time in the 1280s, which gave general instructions for the management of Egypt during the absence of Sultan Qalawun from that land, also provided a fairly clear general picture of where the trouble spots of Cairo were. The memorandum directed those in charge of the city to take special care in patrolling certain areas, especially "the Nile bank, the cemeteries, and ponds such as the Elephant's Pool (*Birkat al-Fil*) and the Abyssinian Pool (*Birkat al-Habash*)...and certain public halls in the Husayniyya Quarter known as *Qā'āt al-Futuwwa*, where turbulent folk hang out."¹

What were the *Qā'āt al-Futuwwa* (Halls of Chivalry), and why were they so dangerous? As we shall see, in the mean streets of al-Husayniyya there flourished a Chandleresque combination of chivalry and gangsterism. In English "chivalry" and "gangsterism" are two words; in medieval Arabic one word may suffice: *futuwwa*. If the chivalrous aspects of the institution are only briefly dealt with here, this is because they have hitherto received more attention from scholars. The earliest Western studies of this puzzling phenomenon concentrated almost exclusively on them; Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall took the lead with a barmy essay in which he not only identified *futuwwa* as an Oriental institution corresponding to Western chivalry but also linked the drinking cup of *futuwwa* initiation with the Holy Grail.² In general, early Western studies of medieval Islam were bedeviled and distorted by the impulse to look for Eastern equivalents of the chivalry of Christendom. Hence the preoccupation with Saracenic heraldry and Saracen fiefs (as *iqṭā's* were understood to be) as well as with the poorly understood phenomena of *furūsiyya* and *futuwwa*. Western scholars went looking for Saracen knights and Arabian orders of chivalry and, with some difficulty, found them. For example, A. N. Poliak, writing in 1939, offered a misleading description of *futuwwa*: "The order of knights devoted to Muhammad's posterity, *al-futuwwa*, which was headed by the sultan and open to native knights, ceased to exist in

the fourteenth century, probably owing to the growing exclusiveness of the 'Turkish' nobility."³ Poliak probably took his lead from much earlier speculations by Étienne Quatremère, who had similarly linked *futuwwa* with the *ashrāf* (descendants of the Prophet).⁴

Fatā is a young man. *Futuwwa* literally means "young-manliness" and, more specifically, the qualities that should be possessed by a young man—honor, generosity, courage, and solidarity with his confreres. (The corresponding Iranian term is *javānmardī*.)⁵ Although there is, I think, no evidence for the existence of *futuwwa* prior to the tenth century, its devotees traced the origins of *futuwwa* back to 'Ali and, through 'Ali, back to Ibrahim. In the course of the tenth to thirteenth centuries the institution spread through Iran, Iraq, Anatolia, Syria, and Egypt. *Futuwwa* lodges seem to have been meeting-places for "les jeunes" (to borrow the term used by the historian of medieval France, Georges Duby).⁶ That is to say, they were places where men who were too young to marry could get together and...well, it depended. Sometimes these lodges were no more than sports clubs; sometimes they acquired political interests and turned into local factions; sometimes they became closely linked with particular crafts and produced something akin to guild solidarity; but sometimes they turned away from the world and dedicated themselves to mystical devotions. In the early thirteenth century, a number of Sufi writers produced treatises that were devoted wholly or in part to the inner aspects of *futuwwa*. (Most notable among them was Ibn al-'Arabi, who addressed three chapters of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* to the subject).

The earliest surviving treatise on *futuwwa*, written in the tenth century by Ibn al-Husayn al-Sulami, stressed the importance of feasting, hospitality, and good fellowship. In the early fourteenth century, Ibn Battuta received a great deal of hospitality in Anatolian towns from the *akhīs*, the Turkish equivalents of the Arabic *fityān*. Ibn Battuta's welcome as a visiting stranger may suggest that a primary function of *futuwwa* lodges was to offer hospitality to visitors, as does

the special status of Ibrahim, or Abraham, as one of the patrons of *futuwwa*, for it was reported of Ibrahim that he never dined alone, since he always had guests at his dinners.⁷ In the 1180s there was an attempt to regularize the existence of such lodges and to bring them under central control, as the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, al-Nasir li-Din Allah (r. 1180–1225) declared himself the head of all the *futuwwa* lodges in Iraq and elsewhere. Al-Nasir's patronage was perhaps designed to reconcile his Sunni and Shi'i subjects in a broadly tolerant umbrella organization.⁸ It was also a means of extending the caliph's influence beyond his frontiers, since he conferred investiture on foreign princes as an honor—a sort of Middle Eastern anticipation of the Burgundian Order of the Golden Fleece.⁹

However, the elevated status of *futuwwa* in Iraq was a transitory phenomenon, for in 1258 the Mongols captured Baghdad and put the last of the city's caliphs to death. Subsequently in 1261 the Abbasid caliphate was revived in Cairo, and the first act of the newly installed caliph was to ceremonially invest Mamluk Sultan Baybars with the trousers of *futuwwa*—a sort of girding with knighthood. In 1263 Baybars in his turn invested the second of the Cairo caliphs with *futuwwa*. There was a lot of fuss about these ceremonies at the time, and in the same year the trousers of *futuwwa* were sent to Berke of the Golden Horde. Arab chiefs of the Khafaja tribe were also invested with *futuwwa*. Quite a bit later, in 1292, Sultan al-Ashraf Khalil invested a chieftain of the Hakkari Kurds in Upper Iraq with *futuwwa*. Thereafter there are no more references to courtly *futuwwa*. It was defunct.¹⁰

But if we move on to the twentieth century and consult a dictionary of colloquial Egyptian, we find *fitiwwa* defined as “neighborhood strong-man and protector of local interests, bully, tough-guy, hood.”¹¹ Moreover, Sawsan al-Messiri's article on the sociology of *futuwwa* in modern Egypt does not deal with any sort of chivalric revival à la Mark Girouard. Rather the article is about neighborhood protection rackets and roughnecks.¹² The modern roughnecks discussed by Messiri and others, though they usually belong to gangs, do not appear to have undergone initiation rituals, nor do they trouble to trace the spiritual origins of what they are doing back to 'Ali and Ibrahim.

Staying with modern *futuwwa*, one finds that it features prominently in modern Egyptian novels and films—most notably the novels of Naguib Mahfouz. *Futuwwa* toughs make a minor appearance in one of Mahfouz's early works, as the bullies of schoolchildren in *Bayn al-*

qaṣrayn (published in 1956; the English translation of 1990 is entitled *Palace Walk*). Their importance grows considerably in his later fiction. Mahfouz's religio-sociological allegory, *Awlād ḥaratinā* (1967; translated in 1972 as *Children of Gebelawi*), is ostensibly devoted to *futuwwa* toughs who dominate the *ḥāras*. The rival strong-arm men in the *ḥāra* chronicled by Mahfouz are all descendants of Jabalawi (namely, God), and the novel only ends with the explosive destruction of these small-time local gangsters. Mahfouz's novel *Malḥamat al-ḥarāfīsh* (1977; translated in 1994 as *The Harafish*), an epic saga of urban ruffraff, is similarly dominated by gang wars and intrigues. The very word used by Mahfouz in his title, *ḥarāfīsh*, is no longer part of modern Egyptian. In a study of medieval urban life under the Mamluk sultans, Ira Lapidus described *ḥarāfīsh* as “beggars and menials” who “formed a turbulent and dangerous mob.”¹³ As I have noted in a review of this novel, Mahfouz in *Malḥamat al-ḥarāfīsh* has shaken off Western fictional models and “gone back to the oral storytelling tradition and revived the traditional romance, which dealt with the activities of such legendary urban criminals as Mercury Ali, Crafty Delilah, and Ahmad the Sickness. Such tales, which celebrate the craftiness and courage of rogues, have always been popular with the *futuwwa* gangsters who ‘protect’ the various quarters of Cairo.”¹⁴

In portraying these toughs, Mahfouz seems to have been drawing on childhood memory as much as on imagination. Interviewed by the novelist Gamal al-Ghitany, he looked back with actual nostalgia on the toughs of the Gamaliyya quarter of Cairo in the opening decades of this century—in particular, their storming of the local police station had lodged in his memory.¹⁵ The *futuwwa* toughs of Mahfouz's novels are not always unmitigated villains, and Mahfouz's attitude to the real-life social phenomenon was and is tinged with ambivalence. He has gone on record with the view that the *futuwwa* leaders of the 1920s and 30s were protectors of the quarters rather than their oppressors, adding, however, that “as with some rulers, the protector sometimes turned into a usurper.”¹⁶ Mahfouz, who was involved in the film industry for much of his career, scripted the screenplay of *al-Futuwwa*. This film, directed by Salah Abou Seif and released in 1957, dealt with the unedifying career of Zaydan, the “Vegetable King,” a racketeer who used violence and corruption to dominate the vegetable market. Haridi, a naive immigrant newly arrived from the countryside, rallies the neighborhood to overthrow Zaydan, but in the course of the struggle Haridi himself becomes corrupted and in his turn

becomes the “Vegetable King.”¹⁷ In the 1950s Mahfouz was also involved in the making of Tawfiq Salih’s *Futuwwat al-Husayniyya* (Tough-guys of the Husayni Quarter), a period gangster movie set in 1905.¹⁸

Indeed *futuwwa* has come to designate a whole genre of modern Egyptian cinema. As the authors of *Arab and African Film Making* observe, “The word *futuwwa* in the Middle Ages and in religious contexts generally designated ideals of chivalry and brotherhood. By now, in Egypt at least, its meaning has degenerated so that it denotes a kind of bully system, a sort of marketplace Mafia, in which any boss who loses his iron grip on his followers will rapidly be replaced by the next-toughest aspirant around.” (As Lizbeth Malkmus notes, this is perhaps faintly reminiscent of the Khaldunian cycle of corruption and decay.)¹⁹ In the films devoted to *futuwwa*, the plot usually revolves around the theme of an honorable man becoming corrupted in the course of trying to fight the system (as in Salah Abou Seif’s film referred to above). The *futuwwa* system always wins (just as Al Pacino is progressively corrupted in *The Godfather*). In *futuwwa* films and the Coppola *Godfather* series alike there is great play with the themes of honor and shame, though the honor in question is, of course, that of thieves. This gangster corruption quite often carries overtones of political allegory, and the political fatalism of such films is vaguely reminiscent of the cynical watchword of di Lampedusa’s great novel, *The Leopard*: “Things must change in order that they stay the same.”

However most of the above is by way of digression. To return (a little reluctantly) to the Middle Ages, it seems that some time between 1261 and modern times a sea change took place in the nature of *futuwwa*—a descent from caliphal patents of honor to muscling in on small-time rackets in the local markets of Cairo. And in fact Qalawun’s *tadhkira*, quoted earlier, strongly suggests that by the 1280s *futuwwa* had already acquired pejorative connotations. It seems that al-Husayniyya was the chief stamping ground of the adherents of *futuwwa*. This area lay to the north of Qahira proper, outside the Bab al-Futuh. From Fatimid times onwards it had been settled by low-grade troopers, and in the early Mamluk period the area continued to provide lodgings for military men. In the 1260s, during the reign of Baybars I, the suburb was further colonized by immigrants of Mongol origin, who had fled to the Mamluks from the Mongol Ilkhanate; still more of them arrived in the 1290s. Baybars probably built his mosque on the northern edge of Husayniyya in order to encourage colonization in the area.

In the thirteenth century Husayniyya was the most dangerous of all the suburbs of Cairo, for it was the home of the “Sons of al-Husayniyya,” otherwise known as the *harāfish*.²⁰ The *harāfish* appear to have had a degree of organization and, at times at least, a recognized overall leader, a Sultan of the *Harāfish*.²¹

In a late Syrian version of the *Sīrat al-Zāhir Baybars*, the medieval folk epic devoted to the largely fictional exploits of the historical Sultan al-Zahir Baybars (1260–77), we are told that Baybars as a young mamluk was in the service of an amir called Najm al-Din al-Bunduqdari, who had his palace in al-Husayniyya. (There is, of course, no truth in any of this.) In this quarter the young Baybars found his friends and allies among the good-hearted thieves and beggars who described themselves as the Sons of Husayniyya.²² In general, the *Sīra* takes a very benign view of the *harāfish* and other lowlife types who inhabited al-Husayniyya and the other squalid suburbs of Cairo, such as Bab al-Luq. Usta ‘Uthman, “Flower of the Gangsters,” a liveryman and one of the main heroes of the popular cycle, is identified as being one of the *shuttār* (and I will come to the significance of this term shortly).

In the real, non-fictional world, al-Husayniyya was also a recognized recruiting ground for *zu‘ar*, or neighborhood militias of young cudgelmen, and was notorious for vice and crime. As the already-mentioned *tadhkiras* indicate, al-Husayniyya was an area over which it was necessary to exercise special vigilance. It was perhaps also not entirely coincidental that Shaykh Khadr al-Mihrani, the populist, rabble-rousing Sufi shaykh and spiritual guru of Baybars, had his *zāwiya* just outside the Bab al-Futuh.²³ According to al-Maqrizi, in the early fourteenth century the suburb improved a bit, becoming gentrified to some extent even though it was still the place to watch acrobats, prizefighters, and other street performers. But then in the 1360s the quarter was attacked by a plague of worms that ate food, paper, and wood. Roofs collapsed, and many houses were abandoned. A flood followed in 1375. The suburb reverted to its slummy ways and in al-Maqrizi’s own time—the early fifteenth century—the place was miserable, underpopulated, and controlled by *zu‘ar* racketeers.²⁴ According to al-Qalqashandi, the soldiers who used to live in al-Husayniyya moved to lodgings closer to the Citadel. However, later yet in the fifteenth century, the area was particularly favored by Qaytbay, whose powerful ally, the amir Yashbak, built his *qubba* there.²⁵ Moreover, there is evidence of continued settlement in Ottoman times, when the butchers and abattoirs were concentrated in this area.

From the eighteenth century onwards, the butchers, a notoriously tough body of men, linked their activities with the Sufi Bayumiyya order, which was powerful in the quarter.²⁶ During Bonaparte's occupation of Egypt, al-Husayniyya, with its turbulent population, proved to be one of the main foci of resistance to the French, so that in the end the French were driven to attempt to raze at least part of the quarter.²⁷

As has already been noted, Mongol immigrants were settled in al-Husayniyya as early as the 1260s. In the years 1294 to 1296 a new wave of immigrants, the Oirats (that is, the western tribe of Mongols, also known as Kalmuks), deserted to the Mamluks, and Sultan Kitbugha settled them in al-Husayniyya. The Arab chroniclers remarked on a number of things concerning the Oirats: First, that they were not Muslims and therefore did not observe Ramadan and also un-Islamically clubbed horses about the head before eating them. Second, that they were astonishingly beautiful, and therefore Oirat women were much sought-after as brides by the Mamluk elite. Also, according to al-Maqrizi's *Khitat*, the Oirats "became known for their *zu'ara* (gangsterism) and *shujā'a* (boldness), and they were called *al-Badūra*. So an individual Oirat might be called *al-Badr* such-and-such. They adopted the dress of *futuwwa*, and they carried weapons. Stories about these people proliferated."²⁸ Later on their fortunes declined, and many ended up working as menial servants in the Citadel.²⁹ These Mongol immigrants may be seen as the medieval Cairene precursors of the Sicilian mafiosi of New York. It also seems likely that they organized their activities on the basis of *futuwwa* lodges. (Indeed it is possible that there was no such thing as popular *futuwwa* in Egypt prior to the arrival of the Oirats and that they brought its rituals with them from Ilkhanid Iraq. While al-Maqrizi clearly did not think that the Oirats were Muslims, they may still have thought of themselves as such.)

If one turns to al-Turkumani al-Hanafi's treatise on *bid'a*, or irreligious innovation, entitled *Kitāb al-luma' fi 'l-hawādith wa 'l-bida'*, which was completed around 1300, one finds the relationship between membership in *futuwwa* and disreputable behavior confirmed. According to al-Turkumani, *futuwwa* is something that angers God and delights Satan, for it fosters crime and sedition. The young men in *futuwwa* lodges organize themselves into militias. They learn to become handy with knives, and if one of their number should be apprehended and taken off to prison they will mass and organize to rescue him.³⁰ Interestingly Ibn Battuta, who was in Egypt in the 1320s, reported the *harāfish* massing to enforce

the release from prison of one of their patrons, the amir Tashtamur Hummus Akhdar.³¹ The (somewhat Masonic) practice of members looking after each other was taken to such an extreme that, according to al-Turkumani, a man might even prostitute his wife in order to support his needy brethren.

Equally reprehensible for the pious Muslim was the *futuwwa*'s un-Islamic initiation rite, which required the drinking of a cup of water and salt and featured another, even more dubious, practice by the group's elder, who stripped the blindfolded *amrad*, or beardless boy, and invested him with the trousers of *futuwwa*. The whole business of eyeing undressed and beardless boys was an abomination. As al-Turkumani put it, "the concupiscent glances of the older men are poisoned arrows from the quiver of Satan."³² The homosexuality of the gaze was, according to him, as damnable as any other form of homosexuality. If members of *futuwwa* lodges did indeed sit and watch as beautiful youths were undressed before their eyes, then this practice may be linked to certain rather controversial Sufi meditation practices. In medieval Persia the religious contemplation of the unbearded was termed *shāhid bāzī*, or "witness play."³³

However, to return to al-Turkumani's case against *futuwwa*, another aspect of the criminality of this sort of brotherhood was the readiness of its members to take up cudgels against the agents of the state (*ghulmān al-shurta wa-wulāt al-Muslimīn*). *Futuwwa* members prided themselves on their skill with weapons, but al-Turkumani piously observed that a true *fatā* should not be identified by his skill with a knife but rather by his generosity to the needy. A little later in 808, al-Turkumani produced a brief *risāla* wholly devoted to *futuwwa*, in which he noted that its apologists presented the deliverance of people from prison or from enforced legal penalties as a charitable activity: the big man (*al-kabīr*) marches along at the head of his following and says, "Deliver your brethren in *futuwwa*," but the right reply to this is "Listen, O you of little courage (*murūwā*), this is all the deceit of the devil (*talbīs Iblīs*), and his aim is to lead you away from the way of the Prophet."³⁴ *Futuwwa*, as al-Turkumani viewed it, was one of the worst *bida's* of the age, and he treated with brisk contempt its partisans' attempt to link it with caliphal *futuwwa*. The attempt to trace its lineage back to 'Ali was, if anything, even more outrageous. Al-Turkumani's discussion of *futuwwa* comes in the fifth *faṣl* of the *Kitāb al-Luma'*.³⁵ It follows a chapter devoted to the evil of chess and precedes the one on the wickedness of brotherhoods devoted to hunting.

Al-Turkumani also wrote a short treatise devoted solely to attacking *futuwwa*, and this has a colophon testifying that it had been endorsed by Ibn Taymiyya and, allegedly, by all the muftis of Egypt.³⁶ Al-Turkumani had indeed studied under Ibn Taymiyya, and it is plausible that it was his teacher who had taught him to loathe *futuwwa*, for the latter had also issued a fatwa against the institution. In it, Ibn Taymiyya indicated that all sorts of vices might flourish in these meetings of young men. According to him, a *futuwwa* meeting was known as *majlis al-daskara*, or “session of the village.” He added that *daskara* had been a neutral word, but in his time it acquired pejorative overtones, because it was applied to gatherings for the purpose of fornication, wine drinking, and singing.³⁷ The entry on *daskara* in Lane’s *Arabic-English Lexicon* offers the meaning, “a town or village,” but two of the earlier definitions are more germane: “a building like a *qasr*, which is surrounded by houses, or chambers, and in which the vitious or immoral (*shuṭṭār*) assemble”; or “houses of the foreigners, *a’ājim*, in which are wine and instruments of music and the like.”³⁸ Incidentally, al-Turkumani in his *Risāla* on *futuwwa* twice refers to the ritual of induction as a *tazkira*. Although Labib proposed emending this to *tadhkira*, another possibility is that *tazkira* represents a mishearing of *daskara*.

A fatwa by the fourteenth-century Aleppan Zayn ‘Umar al-Din b. al-Wardi (1292–1349) echoed al-Turkumani’s writings in denouncing the prominence of *liwāt*, or homosexuality, in *futuwwa*.³⁹ It is indeed easy to imagine that the *futuwwa*’s cult of the young man may in certain circumstances have become confused with a different sort of cult of beardless youths. A number of litterateurs in the Mamluk period, among them al-Badri and al-Nawaji, produced anthologies devoted to the joys of the beautiful boy. Al-Badri’s was entitled “The Shining Dawn: On the Description of Fair Faces”; al-Nawaji, who died in 1455 and is better known for his anthology on wine-drinking, the *Halbat al-kumayt*, compiled at least two treatises on beautiful young men: “The Throwing-off of Shame in the Description of the First Growth of the Beard,” and “The Prairie of the Gazelles in the Purity of the Beauty of Servant Boys.” Mamluk moralists were also much vexed by the *mukhannath*, or transvestite prostitutes, who worked the streets.⁴⁰

Ibn Taymiyya, al-Turkumani, and other Mamluk experts on *bid‘a* rejected the claim of members of popular *futuwwa* lodges that their chain of initiation could be traced back to the Abbasid caliph al-Nasir. In so doing, they denied any link between popular Cairene

futuwwa of relatively recent date and the more respectable and longer-established *futuwwa* of the courts. On a related issue, studies of twelfth-century Iraqi *futuwwa* have suggested that one of al-Nasir’s aims in promoting the institution was to reconcile Sunnism and moderate Shi‘ism under its umbrella. The *futuwwa*’s slogan *Lā fatā illā ‘Alī* (‘Ali is the youth par excellence) and its tracing its lineage of initiation back to ‘Ali might be taken as hinting at Shi‘i aspects to the organization, and it is probably true that Shi‘ism was more of a vital force in Mamluk Egypt than has hitherto been realized. However, as far as the Mamluk period and Mamluk sources are concerned, there is no real evidence to suggest that *futuwwa* was linked to Shi‘i sympathies or practices—and this was not one of Ibn al-Turkumani’s or Ibn Taymiyya’s grumbles. (Incidentally, Bulliet in his work on tenth-to-twelfth-century Nishapur found that members of *futuwwa*, when their affiliation was identifiable, were invariably Shafi‘ite Muslims.⁴¹)

Although Ibn Taymiyya and al-Turkumani went out of their way to denounce various aspects of *futuwwa*, Abu ‘Abdallah b. al-Hajj al-Abdari (1336–66?), who similarly wrote a lengthy treatise on *bid‘a*, does not seem to have noticed the phenomenon at all. Ibn al-Hajj did deal disapprovingly with homosexuality, gazing on men, singing and dancing, various unacceptable Sufi rituals, and dodgy artisanal and commercial practices, but he does not discuss *futuwwa* (unless I have missed it). The evidence is too fragmentary and relies too much on the apparent silence of the sources for one to come to any firm conclusion here, but what this suggests is that popular, quasi-criminal, ritualized *futuwwa* was a phenomenon of limited duration in medieval Egypt. The *futuwwa*-loving Oirats had arrived at the end of the thirteenth century. Ibn Taymiyya and al-Turkumani lived and wrote at the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century.⁴² Gabriel Baer, who wrote several excellent studies of guilds in the Ottoman period, suggested that there was an essential continuity between medieval Egyptian *futuwwa* and the craft-based guilds of Egypt in the Ottoman period.⁴³ However, the supposed continuity is doubtful. I have come across no references to *futuwwa* in the Mamluk lands in the late fourteenth or the fifteenth century. Ibn al-Turkumani had urged the Mamluk authorities to ban *futuwwa*, and it is indeed possible that recommendations from him and other like-minded “ulema” were eventually heeded. A new wave of *futuwwa* manuscripts was produced in Egypt in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but, although al-Jabarti’s ‘*Ajā’ib*

al-āthār contains plentiful information about criminal activity and popular disturbances in Ottoman Egypt, the word *futuwwa* does not seem to be in the author's vocabulary. Compared to *futuwwa*, the brotherhood of the *ḥarāfīsh* had a longer existence. The first reference to the *ḥarāfīsh* was in 1298, but they were still a power to be reckoned with at least as late as 1516, when the shaykh of the *ḥarāfīsh* accompanied Qansuh al-Ghuri on his ill-fated journey to Syria.⁴⁴

Futuwwa seems to have been linked, however vaguely, with another and more long-lived phenomenon, one that at first blush would not appear urban at all: the hunting lodge. *Futuwwa* treatises written during the caliphate of al-Nasir had spelled out the hunting privileges of young men, giving them special license to hunt with crossbows and listing the *manāsib*, or fourteen noble species of birds that they could honorably hunt.⁴⁵ According to Ibn Khaldun, the caliph was crazy about crossbows and pigeons.⁴⁶ With respect to the belt of *futuwwa*, Louis Massignon has observed that "it was a military belt worn by an archer, a '*tir-bent*,' an arrow belt, the insignia of the guild of 'couriers' (*shātīr*, whence the Indian *shattar*, religious order, derives...)." ⁴⁷

It is noteworthy that, after al-Turkumani had finished discussing the wickedness of *futuwwa* lodges, he then immediately turned to the use of the crossbow. Hunting leagues that used the crossbow were reprehensible, according to him, because they were liable to break the Islamic law on slaughtering. The crossbow was cruel to birds and proscribed in Hadith. The *shuṭṭār* huntsmen were wicked because they valued marksmanship more than piety. They were also bad because they did not mind admitting into their ranks homosexual men—nor, for that matter, Jews and Christians. *Shuṭṭār* preferred to swear by the dirt, rather than by God. All that mattered to these awful people was the ability to kill certain birds—the *manāsib* birds. If one succeeded, one was acclaimed a *shātīr*. Their group solidarity and their unquestioning obedience to their leaders were also to be abominated. So was their trampling through other people's fields. Although a member of such a group is called a *shātīr*, or cunning one, according to al-Turkumani, the only real cunning people are the good Muslims.⁴⁸ (Interestingly and curiously, Ibn Turkumani's aversion to companies of archers finds a parallel in the Western world in the fifteenth-century *Malleus Maleficarum*, whose authors, Krämer and Sprenger, wrote of "the witchcraft of archers." According to the famous inquisitors, such skill as certain crack archers possessed could only be explained by their having entered into a

pact with the devil.⁴⁹ Also, more germanely with respect to Islamic archery's association with vice, the sixth chapter of al-Badri's treatise on beautiful boys was specifically devoted to archery and hunting and to the erotic prospects afforded by these activities.) Al-Turkumani's view that hunting with a crossbow was illicit was backed up, to some extent at least, by Ibn Mangli's fourteenth-century treatise on hunting, *Uns al-malā bi-waḥsh al-falā*, in which the author states that it is forbidden to hunt and kill animals using blunt weapons or projectiles, such as the balls fired from a *bunduqa*.⁵⁰

In medieval Arabic dictionaries, a *shātīr* (plural: *shuṭṭār*) was defined as a wrongdoer, a clever thief, someone who is agile and witty or swift on his feet. But in the usage of al-Turkumani and other medieval Egyptian writers, the word was also quite specifically associated with hunting and the use of the bow. While a *shātīr* and a *fatā* were not necessarily one and the same man, Ibn Taymiyya discussed *futuwwa* and assemblies of archers in one and the same disapproving breath. These are people, he claimed, who have taken an oath of infidelity, and who celebrate together with feasting.⁵¹ It seems that they formed gangs, somewhat similar to the Mohawks of eighteenth-century London or the Apaches of Paris in the 1920s. If the adherents of *futuwwa* excelled with the knife, the *shuṭṭār* were more versatile, being enthusiasts also of single-stick fencing and wrestling as well as archery. In the early fourteenth century the sports and enthusiasms of the *shuṭṭār* and like-minded wastrels briefly enjoyed court favor under Sultan al-Muzaffar Hajji (r. 1346–47). This young sultan enjoyed watching the single-stick fencing of the *awbāsh* (riffraff). He gambled on racing pigeons and donned leather breeches in order to wrestle with servants and lowlife types. (His other enthusiasms were polo and torture.)⁵²

In the folk epic devoted to Baybars, which we have already mentioned, Baybars as a young mamluk was initiated into a hunting lodge in Damascus with the assistance of Fatima bint al-Awqasi, daughter of the bowyer, after he had proved himself by shooting at the *manāsib* birds with a crossbow. The corporation of archers to which he was admitted was under the leadership of a shaykh and a *naqīb*; it had forty members and was dedicated to hunting the ten noble breeds of bird. On the day of the hunt, each sub-group of four archers was assigned one particular breed to hunt. After this first round, the winner—in the *Sira*, the winner was of course Baybars—then had to use his crossbow to bring down forty birds, four from each species. The

anonymous author concluded his account of Baybars's prowess as an archer with the lament that those were the days when people preferred hunting to games of tric-trac or dominoes.⁵³

The above was fiction, and moreover fiction from Ottoman Syria, but it may well reflect medieval realities. Historically, such jolly huntsmen may have been capable of providing sizable armed militias in times of crisis. When in 1524 Ahmad al-Kha'in, the Turkish governor of Egypt, rebelled against Istanbul, he called upon the support of the *zu'ar* and *shuttār* to help him dislodge the janissaries from the Citadel of Cairo. According to the geomancer and historical romancer Ibn Zunbul, the two leaders of the *shuttār*, Shaban al-Shagharti, Head of the Bowyers, and Ahmad al-Shirbini chose from their followers a squad to enter the Citadel by an underground passage and so come upon the janissaries unawares. Later on, when the Ottomans launched a counteroffensive, Ibn Zunbul tells us that the *shuttār*, along with the *zu'ar*, the riffraff, and every dog and his brother, were among the last of the rebel's supporters.⁵⁴

The tales of *The Thousand and One Nights* teem with *shuttār* who get into scrapes but who, being infinitely resourceful, use artful dodges to get themselves out of those scrapes.⁵⁵ Some of the *shuttār* featured in the *Nights*, such as Crafty Delilah or Calamity Ahmad, had epics in their own right devoted to them in medieval Egypt. Ali Zaybaq was the most famous of the *shuttār* to feature in the *Nights*. In a historico-literary analysis of "The Adventures of Mercury Ali of Cairo," André Miquel has suggested that in this story, notionally set in Harun al-Rashid's Baghdad, Ali, who eventually wins the caliph's admiration and his blessing on Ali's marriage to Delilah's daughter Zaynab, is in some sort of metaphorical sense being inducted into Iraqi *futuwwa*.⁵⁶ Other *shuttār* were specifically immortalized (or should that be "immoralized"?) in some of the stories added to later Egyptian recensions of *Alf layla walayla*, among them, "The Sharper of Alexandria and the Chief of Police," "The Chief of Qus Police and the Sharper," "The Simpleton and Sharper," "The Tale of the Sharpers with the Shroff and his Ass," and "The Story of the Three Sharpers." Not all *shuttār* were all that sharp. Several stories indeed are devoted to their stupidity—stupidity heightened in some cases by drugs. And there is evidence that at least one real villain in fifteenth-century Egypt took to calling himself after the fictional Ahmad al-Danaf, or Calamity Ahmad. He was executed in 1485.⁵⁷ In Cairo the legendary villains

enjoyed the status of Robin Hood or Dick Turpin. The cult of such fictional "heroic" villains can be seen as a later and more vulgar version of the cult of crime and lowlife that was such a striking feature of the culture of the literary elite in Buyid Iraq, as represented by, for example, the tenth-century vizier and patron of Abu Dulaf, al-Sahib b. 'Abbad.⁵⁸ Moreover, the cult of the criminal can, of course, be traced further back yet, to the semi-legendary lives of the *sa'ālīk* poets of pre-Islamic Arabia.

As noted above, the caliph al-Nasir li-Din Allah had been an enthusiast for *futuwwa*, hunting with the crossbow, and pigeons. Like crossbow hunting, pigeon fancying could have disreputable undertones in medieval Islamic society, and indeed pigeon racing was condemned by most religious authorities. A pigeon racer could not bear witness in a court. According to its enemies, pigeon racing was invented by the citizens of Sodom (so the sport is of some antiquity);⁵⁹ professed pigeon fanciers used the excuse of pursuing errant pigeons to break into houses or to spy upon women from the rooftops. It was also forbidden to hunt pigeons, since it was not *halāl* to consume them. According to al-Jahiz's treatise on animals, the rearing and flying of pigeons was a privilege of *fityān*.⁶⁰ In *The Thousand and One Nights* story, "The Rogueries of Delilah the Crafty and Her Daughter Zaynab the Cony-Catcher," Crafty Delilah's father had been the caliph's master of carrier pigeons, and eventually Delilah is awarded the same post. In another story, "The Adventures of Mercury 'Ali of Cairo," 'Ali pretends to have eaten Delilah's pigeons. So, to begin to conclude, one finds a skein of ill-defined yet indubitable connections between the young men involved in pigeon fancying, crime, hunting, boy-ogling, and the rituals of brotherhood.

Such lowlife denizens of Cairo's poorer quarters can be seen as marginal figures—as subversives and representatives of a counterculture. However, it is doubtful that this was their own perspective on the matter, for their gangs and associations played a central role in the functioning of the city. As far as most of the inhabitants of Cairo's *hāras* were concerned, it may be that it was the Mamluk elite whom they perceived as the marginal men and the representatives of an alien counterculture. The defense of poor and humble citizens from the oppression of the alien Turkish soldiery was surely one of the most important roles of *futuwwa* lodges and similar groups.

This study concentrated on the *futuwwa* and *shuttār* groups, but al-Husayniyya and the Bab al-Luq teemed

with other “*hushrāt*,” or “human vermin.” I have said little about the *zu‘ar* and the *harāfīsh* (for these ruffians have been well studied by Brinner and Lapidus). I have said nothing at all about the *ju‘aydiyya*, or Curly-Haired Ones (possibly a confederation of Gypsy toughs: remarkably little work has been done on the Gypsies in the medieval Near East). According to a footnote in Quatremère’s *Histoire des sultans mamlouks*, Tenreiro claimed that Gypsies (*Bohemiens*) were called in Arabic “*Xatres*,” plausibly *shātīr*, plural: *shuṭṭār*.⁶¹ Nor have I had time to research and discuss the *ṭawwābūn*, or repentant bandits who turned “sultan’s evidence” and became policemen. Nor have I discussed the subdivisions of the Banu Sasan, as listed in al-Zarkhuri’s conjuring manual—including the *Ashāb al-Mīm* (or professional treasure hunters), the false ascetics, the Halwati snake-charmers, and the Saramiti occultists.⁶² Yet the lives of all these strange people deserve at least a footnote in the turbulent history of Cairo.

London, United Kingdom

NOTES

1. Shāfi‘ b. ‘Alī, *Faḍl al-Ma‘thūr*, Oxford, Bodleian MS Marsh 424, fol. 94b. This is the third of three *tadhkiras* addressed to Qalawun’s son al-Salih in Shafi‘ b. ‘Alī’s life of Qalawun. It was translated in part (with no indication of the source) in D. S. Margoliouth, *Cairo, Jerusalem, and Damascus* (London, 1907), p. 79. For another *tadhkira* from the same period, see Ibn al-Furāt, *Tā’rikh al-duwal wa al-mulūk*, ed. Q. Zurayk (Beirut, 1942), vol. 7, pp. 196–200. It dates from 679/1281 and was drafted by Ibn al-Mukarram. The *tadhkira* in Ibn al-Furāt’s chronicle emphasizes the need to police Husayniyya, but does not actually mention halls of *futuwwa*. The following works discuss the 679 *tadhkira* as given in Ibn al-Furāt: Linda Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan: The Career of al-Mansur Qalawun and the Consolidation of Mamluk Rule in Egypt and Syria (679–689 A.H. / 1279–1290 A.D.)*, Freiburger Islamstudien, vol. 18 (Stuttgart, 1998), pp. 209–10; Léonor Fernandes, “On Conducting the Affairs of State: A Guideline of the Fourteenth Century,” *Annales Islamologiques*, vol. 24 (1988), pp. 81–91; and Sato Tsugitaka, *State and Rural Society in Medieval Islam* (Leiden, 1981), pp. 105–23. Axel Moberg, “Regierungspromemoria eines ägyptischen Sultans,” in *Festschrift Sachau*, ed. Gotthold Weill (Berlin, 1915), pp. 406–21, translated and commented on the first of the three *tadhkiras* in *Faḍl al-Ma‘thūr*, fols. 82b–89b; see Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamluk Sultanate 1250–1382* (Beckenham, Kent, 1986), pp. 72–73.
2. J. von Hammer-Purgstall, “Sur la chevalerie des arabes antérieure à celle de l’Europe, et sur l’influence de la première sur la seconde,” *Journal Asiatique*, 4th series, vol. 13 (1849), pp. 5–14.
3. A. N. Poliak, *Feudalism in Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon (1250–1900)* (London, 1939), p. 15.
4. Étienne Quatremère, ed., *Histoire des sultans mamlouks de l’Égypte, écrite en arabe par Taki-Eddin-Ahmed-Makrizi*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1845), vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 58–59n.
5. On the Iranian tradition, see Morteza Saraf, ed., *Traité des compagnons-chevaliers* (Tehran and Paris, 1973) (Persian text with analytical introduction in French by Henri Corbin); Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism* (London, 1989), pp. 91–92; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Spiritual Chivalry,” in *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (London, 1991), pp. 304–15.
6. Georges Duby, “Au XIIe siècle: les Jeunes,” *Annales, économies, sociétés, civilisations* 5 (1964): 835–46.
7. On this sort of *futuwwa* in general, and on *futuwwa* in Anatolia more specifically, see F. Taeschner, *Zunft und Bruderschaften im Islam* (Zurich, 1979).
8. Angelika Hartmann, *Al-Nasir li-Din Allah (1180–1225)* (Berlin, 1975), pp. 92–135; Herbert Mason, *Two Statesmen of Medieval Islam: Vizir Ibn Hubayra (499–560 AH/1105–1165 AD) and Caliph al-Nasir li Din Allah (553–622 AH/1158–1225 AD)* (The Hague, 1972), pp. 118–26; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Spiritual Chivalry,” pp. 304–15.
9. See, for an example of this, R. S. Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols* (New York, 1977), p. 138.
10. On courtly *futuwwa* under the Mamluks, see Taeschner, *Zunft und Bruderschaften im Islam*, pp. 219–25; idem, “Die islamischen Futuwabünde: das Problem, ihrer Entstehung und die Grundlinien ihrer Geschichte,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, n.s. vol. 12 (1934): 38–39.
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The Controversy of Shaykh Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī and Handsome, Moon-Faced Youths: A Case Study of *Shāhid-Bāzī* in Medieval Sufism

Lloyd Ridgeon
University of Glasgow
UK

Abstract

The ability to witness the divine in creation has been one of the features that has often distinguished Sufis from non-Sufis. One of the most controversial manifestations of this was *shāhid-bāzī* (“playing the witness”), which was a practice of gazing at the form of young males in order to witness the inner, divine presence. Since medieval times a Persian Sufi by the name of Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī has been most commonly associated with *shāhid-bāzī* (especially during the *samāʿ*—or the ritual of Sufi music and dance). The controversy relating to Kirmānī seems to have focused on the homoerotic nature of *shāhid-bāzī*, yet a close examination of the texts reveal that the criticisms about Kirmānī relate to a wide range of Sufi practices and doctrines. An investigation of the contexts of these criticisms indicate that thirteenth–fourteenth-century Sufism was diverse and fluid, and that the systematisation of Sufism into brotherhoods (*ṭarīqa*) which was taking place in Kirmānī’s lifetime had not resulted in a bland conformity of faith and practice.

Résumé

La capacité à témoigner du divin dans la création a été l’une des caractéristiques qui distinguent les soufis de la non-soufis. Une des manifestations les plus controversés de cette caractéristique été *shāhid-bāzī* (« en jouant le témoin »), une pratique de regarder la forme de jeunes hommes afin pour contempler la présence divine intérieur. Depuis l’époque médiévale le soufi persan Awḥad al-Dīn al-Kirmānī a été le plus souvent associé avec *shāhid-bāzī*, surtout pendant le rituel soufie de la musique et danse (*samāʿ*). La controverse relative à Kirmānī semble avoir porté sur la nature homoérotique de *shāhid-bāzī*, cependant un examen attentif des textes révèlent que les critiques à propos Kirmānī concernent un large éventail de pratiques et de doctrines soufies. Une enquête sur les contextes de ces critiques montrent que le soufisme au cours des XIII^e et XIV^e siècles a été diversifié, et que la systématisation du soufisme en confréries (*ṭarīqa*) qui avait lieu dans la vie d’Kirmānī n’avait pas abouti à une conformité terne de la foi et la pratique.

Keywords

Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī, eroticism, *ḥulūl*, *samāʿ*, *shāhid-bāzī*, Sufism

Introduction

Shaykh Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī (d. 635/1237–8) was a renowned Persian Sufi who became notorious for some or celebrated by others for a practice known as *shāhid-bāzī* (literally, “playing the witness”). For Kirmānī this was a ritualised activity that was grounded on a belief that God may be seen by contemplating pleasant faces that bear witness to divine beauty. *Shāhid-bāzī* in Kirmānī’s case meant gazing at and dancing with young men during musical concerts (*samāʿ*), a ritual that for many practitioners culminated in spiritual ecstasy.¹ A number of anecdotes that were recorded during the hundred years after Kirmānī’s death bear testimony to the controversy that surrounded him. In these anecdotes celebrated Sufis including Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, Shams-i Tabrīzī, and Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar Suhrawardī expressed opinions on Kirmānī, which cast him in a negative light.²

This paper will investigate the controversy surrounding Kirmānī and *shāhid-bāzī*. Unfortunately Kirmānī did not leave behind any systematic treatise that detailed his understanding of the practice; the only writings attributed to him are a large corpus of quatrains that most probably include a number that originated from the pens of other Persian Sufis. The doubtful attribution of all of these verses to Kirmānī, and both their insufficient number and inadequate treatment of *shāhid-bāzī* render problematic the task of comprehending his own views on the practice. For this reason, the practice of *shāhid-bāzī* will be explained in this paper by analysing the arguments of one of most coherent and

¹ This is typified in the treatise that is cited frequently in this paper, the *Manāqib-i Awḥād al-Dīn Ḥāmid b. Abī l-Fakhr-i Kirmānī*, edited B. Furūzānfar (Tehran: Surūsh, 1969). The treatise describes the mystical state of Shaykh Saʿd al-Dīn Ḥammūya, who lost normal consciousness during a *samāʿ* for two hours and was transported to another spiritual station (98). The treatise also describes the mystical experience of Kirmānī who in a state of ecstasy during the *samāʿ* would recite quatrains that he witnessed written upon a green tablet that appeared before his eyes. The inference being that these verses were divine in origin (102–3).

² Non-Sufis too have offered information on Kirmānī that endorsed the criticisms levelled at him. Ḥamdallāh Mustawfī (d. 749/1349) relates how when the *samāʿ* was in full swing, Kirmānī would rip open the shirts of young men and dance breast to breast (*Tārīkh-i guzīda*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Nawāʾī [Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1362/1983–4], 667). Note how the practice of tearing open the shirt of males was rendered by Rūmī into a spiritual teaching:

O boy, if you want spirit rend the shirt,
So that you may become pure quickly.
A Sufi is one who seeks that purity
Not woollen clothes, patching and buggery.

(*Mathnawī* V. 362–3. This translation [which is my own] is from the Persian edition that was used by R.A. Nicholson for his translation. See *Mathnawī-yi maʿnawī Mawlawī [nuskha-yi Nicholson]* [Tehran: Pizhmān, 1373/1994–5]).

systematic advocates of *shāhid-bāzī*, namely those of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī (d. 526/1131), whose Persian work *Tamhīdāt* delineates how an infinite and incomparable God appears in a finite world in a manner that humans can comprehend. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt was not the only Persian Sufi to discuss in a systematic and sympathetic fashion the metaphysics and practice of *shāhid-bāzī*, indeed both Aḥmad Ghazālī (d. 520/1126) and Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī (d. 688/1289) earned a reputation that approximated that of Kirmānī. However, the confines of this article do not permit an extended survey of all medieval Persian Sufis who elaborated on the theme of this topic. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s explanation of the ideal *shāhid-bāzī* is subsequently balanced with an examination of the fears expressed by some Persian Sufis of the dangers pertaining to the *samā‘*, when there was an opportunity for Sufis to engage in *shāhid-bāzī*. Having outlined the contours of the ideal and the dangers pertaining to the practice, the article will then briefly review the little that is known about Kirmānī’s life and his version of Sufism. Subsequently an assessment will be made of three Persian Sufi sources which were all composed within one hundred years of Kirmānī’s death, that either appear to condemn *shāhid-bāzī*, or else criticise him for abusing a spiritual practice.

The purpose of this article is to understand the ideal of *shāhid-bāzī*, the metaphysical and practical issues that were associated with it, and finally the controversy surrounding Kirmānī. To anticipate the conclusion to the third of the three aims, the criticisms of medieval Sufis levelled against Kirmānī do not always appear to be related to sensual *shāhid-bāzī*. Although the reasons for the antipathy of these Sufis is not always clear, it may have included jealousy and rivalry, a preference for alternative forms of Sufi discipline and practice, and an aversion for the ontology that Kirmānī’s Sufi world view endorsed. This suggests that medieval Persian Sufism was far from homogenous, and that the establishment of Sufi orders around the time of Kirmānī’s lifetime certainly did not result in a unity of practice or belief.

Although the controversy surrounding Kirmānī and *shāhid-bāzī* is no longer a burning issue³ (as Sufism no longer enjoys the same widespread following

³ Despite this Kirmānī has been chastised by the Iranian anti-Sufi commentator Aḥmad Kasravī (d. 1946) who suggested that he engaged in pederasty. See Kasravī’s *Šūfiqārī*, translated as “Sufism,” in Lloyd Ridgeon, *Sufi Castigator: Ahmad Kasravi and the Iranian Mystical Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2006), 79. Kasravī uses the term *sāda-bāzī* which means “playing with beardless youths.” But it is clear that he meant pederasty as he continued by quoting from Jāmī, who disguised Kirmānī’s “evil acts” (*zishṭkāri*) with other garments (i.e. in other phrases). See Kasravī, *Šūfiqārī* (Sunnyvale, Calif.: Kaweh Publications, n.d.), 28. Western scholars of Sufism such as William Chittick defend Kirmānī. Chittick states that “Certain Sufis, such as Awhād al-Dīn Kirmānī and Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī, seem to have made systematic use of outward objects in the world as supports for the contemplation of the inner Witness” (William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love* [Albany: SUNY Press, 1983], 288).

that it enjoyed in pre-modern times), this article hopes to shed some light on a neglected aspect of medieval Persian Sufism by examining the relevant texts, and as such is an essay on historiography. There has been very little research in English on this important thirteenth-century Sufi,⁴ although his name appears regularly, though sporadically in many of the academic surveys written by Western scholars about other Sufis of the period. The most extensive non-Persian study is Mikail Bayram's Turkish work on the topic which investigates Kirmānī's life, teachings and students.⁵ The Persian literature offers more depth. The first major contribution was Furūzānfar's introductory essay and edition of a thirteenth-century hagiography entitled *Manāqib-i Awḥād al-Dīn* ("The Virtues of Awḥād al-Dīn").⁶ The identity of the author of this text is not known, but Furūzānfar has shown that it must have been composed after Kirmānī's death, most likely during the second half of the seventh century (*hijrī*) that is between 1252–1301.⁷ Although the author presented Kirmānī in a positive light, Furūzānfar suggests that he did not know Kirmānī personally, but related the stories about him from another source, perhaps one of the shaykh's immediate disciples. As a result it is necessary to exercise due caution when assessing this text as a source for Kirmānī's own belief and practice.⁸

A large *dīwān* of Kirmānī's quatrains was published by Aḥmad Abū Maḥbūb in 1987, which included the editor's introductory essay that surveyed the same territory as Furūzānfar's earlier work.⁹ The *Dīwān* appears in a manuscript from the Ayasofya collection (Istanbul) that is composed of several other *ūrfānī* texts. It was not authorised by the poet himself, as the "editor" states that Kirmānī's writings were scattered here and there, so the task was to assemble them into a coherent form. Thus the "editor" collected 1724 quatrains and placed them within twelve subject headings.¹⁰ Of particular interest are the quatrains that

⁴ One notable exception is an English translation of 120 of Kirmānī's quatrains: B. Weischer & P.L. Wilson, *Heart's Witness: The Sufi Quatrains of Awḥaduddīn Kirmānī* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978).

⁵ Mikail Bayram, *Şeyh Evhadü'd-Din Hâmid el-Kirmânî ve Evhadîyye Tarikatı* (Konya: Ömer Faruk Bayram, 1993).

⁶ See note 1. Furūzānfar's untitled introduction (9–64) is henceforth referred to as "Introduction."

⁷ Furūzānfar, "Introduction," 55–6.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *Dīwān-i ruba'iyāt-i Awḥād al-Dīn Kirmānī*, ed. Aḥmad Abū Maḥbūb (Tehran: Surūsh, 1987).

¹⁰ Chapter One: On unity, praise of God and remembrance and a eulogy of the prophet and his followers; Chapter Two: On the *sharī'a*; Chapter Three: On Sufism and the inner states; Chapter Four: On purity, cleansing the self and renouncing lust; Chapter Five: On good works and whatever is included in a good name; Chapter Six: On love and witnessing; Chapter Seven: On the approved qualities; Chapter Eight: On ugly qualities; Chapter Nine: On journeying and departing; Chapter Ten: On spring, wine and *samā'*; Chapter Eleven: On ecstatic words (*tāmāt*); Chapter Twelve: On the last wills and the grief for the departed, on *fanā'* and *baqā'* and mystical states.

describe the *samāʿ*, and those pertaining to *shāhid-bāzī*.¹¹ The *Dīwān* was republished in 1996 by Wafāʾī with a long introduction (that covered topics such as Buddhism and the rise of Sufism) that was mainly derivative of earlier sources.¹² The main interest of this publication was the inclusion of a *mathnawī* entitled *Miṣbāḥ al-arwāḥ* (which has been attributed to Kirmānī, although this attribution is generally considered to be incorrect). Just as there have been very few surveys relating to Kirmānī, the concept and controversy of *shāhid-bāzī* has fared little better, although there are several works that have offered preliminary or summarised sections within articles or books on related topics.¹³

I. The *Shāhid*

The early and medieval Sufi discussion of a more immanent God tended to be legitimised with reference to a handful of Qurʾanic verses. These included 41:53 which states, “We shall show them Our signs in the heavens and in their own souls, until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. Does it not suffice your Lord that He is a witness to everything.” Just as God is a witness, this verse suggested to Sufis that God too could be witnessed in the created world and also mystically within the heart of the individual. Sufis themselves claimed that the mystical unveiling resulted in an ecstatic overflowing of uncontrollable emotions, and seemingly outrageous statements that were uttered during these overwhelming experiences were considered tolerable if they were denied at a later stage of sober reflection, which would in theory endorse a more transcendent divine.¹⁴ One of the most celebrated, or notorious cases, was that of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, whose supposed declaration “I am the Truth” was often understood to be the reason for his execution.¹⁵ While Ḥallāj witnessed God within himself, a contemporary of his, Abū l-Ḥusayn Nūrī, heard God through the bark of a dog (an animal considered unclean according to the Islamic

¹¹ *Dīwān-i rubaʿiyāt*, 224–8 (nos. 1068–105).

¹² *Aḥwāl wa āsār-i Awḥad al-Dīn Ḥāmid b. Abī al-Fakhr Kirmānī*, ed. Muḥammad Wafāʾī (Tehran: Mā, 1375/1996).

¹³ Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul*, trans. John O’Kane (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 448–519; Leonard Lewisohn “Prolegomenon to the study of Ḥāfiẓ,” in *Ḥafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*, ed. idem (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 43–55. In Persian see Syrus Shamisa, *Shāhid-bāzī dar adabiyāt-i fārsī* (Tehran: Firdaws, 1381/2002).

¹⁴ See for example Rūmī’s story about the ecstatic statements of Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī, who asked his followers to stab him with knives should he repeat his statement (*The Mathnawī of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī*, translated by R.A. Nicholson [London: Luzac, 1925–40], 4:388–90).

¹⁵ The context of Ḥallāj’s execution has been summarized in Carl Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), 102–10.

legal tradition), and replied “*labbayk*” (“Here I am, Lord”) which is a phrase more commonly associated with the utterance of a pilgrim approaching the Kaaba on pilgrimage. Of all the early cases related to witnessing God one of the most coherent and sophisticated descriptions was penned by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī. His Persian masterpiece, *Tamhīdāt*, includes discussions on the spirit and mystical witnessing which have a direct relevance to the topic under discussion.¹⁶ Chapter seven of this treatise, entitled “The reality of the heart and spirit,”¹⁷ analyses in a direct yet familiar fashion (features which have made the work so idiosyncratic and appealing in the Persian tradition) the mystery of the spirit, which as the Qur’an states “And they ask you about the spirit. Say, ‘The spirit is of my Lord’s command, and you have not been given except a little knowledge’” (17:85). ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt elaborated on this verse and stated that Adam, and those with Adam’s attributes (that is, all humans) possess this spirit since God “breathed into him of My spirit” (38:72). More provocatively, he argued that the spirit was eternal, and that the Qur’anic phrase “[the spirit] is from the command of my Lord” should be understood in such a way that the spirit is the same as the command. This implies a direct relationship between the human and divine spirit, which renders the following statement of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s more comprehensible: “[the spirit] is the Actor, not the acted; it is the Powerful, not the overpowered.”¹⁸ Moreover, he considered that the world was brimming with the spirit, or in other words, God’s existence was present everywhere: “The spirit is neither inside nor outside [the body], and nor is it inside or outside the world. Alas! Understand what is being said! The spirit is neither attached to nor separated from the body. God Most High is with the world.”¹⁹

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt was precipitous to deny that this belief represented the descent of God’s spirit into the human who already possessed a spirit. Such a perspective would have been tantamount to heresy as the concept of two spirits in one body (*ḥulūl*) was a charge often levelled against the Sufis by their opponents. Rather ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt claimed that his description of the spirit expressed utter existential unity (*tawḥīd*).²⁰ To witness the reality of the

¹⁶ ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, ed. Afif Osseiran (Tehran: Manūchihrī, 1373/1994–5). One of the better surveys of particular aspects of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s thought is Leonard Lewisohn, “In Quest of Annihilation: Imaginalization and the mystical death in the *Tamhīdāt* of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī,” in *Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi*, ed. idem (London: KPI, 1993), 285–336.

¹⁷ *Tamhīdāt*, 141–167.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 257–8.

²⁰ See his vehement denials of *ḥulūl* in relation to the unity of the *shāhid* and *mashhūd* in *Tamhīdāt*, 115.

spirit (of God and man) was one of the secrets of mystical experience, yet ‘Ayn al-Qudāt offered an account of his own unveiling: “I saw a light which separated from [God] and a light which came from me. The lights met and joined together and made [such] a beautiful form that I remained bewildered in this state for some time.”²¹

Such witnessing is associated with a spiritual station in which life and death are understood in an unconventional manner, “for death is separation and exile, and life is meeting and ecstasy”; either way, the reality is the presence of God with the lover. Only the real *shāhid-bāzān* understand the reality of this station, and ‘Ayn al-Qudāt offers two *ḥadīths* (relating to Muḥammad’s so-called “ascension” (*mi‘rāj*) when he travelled through the heavens to witness God)²² to guide his readers. Both of these have a particular resonance to the way that the term *shāhid-bāz* unravelled in the later Sufi tradition: “I saw my Lord on the night of ascent in the form of a young man” and “Beware! The beardless youth has a complexion like that of God.”²³ ‘Ayn al-Qudāt continued, giving an explicit reference to the practice of *shāhid-bāzī* during the *samā’*:

Know that the leader of the *shāhid-bāzān* was Muṣṭafā [Muḥammad]. He gave the trace of infidelity and Islam in the following way: ‘Oh God! Life is through you and death is through you.’ Alas! A singer must be a beautiful-faced *shāhid* when singing these couplets [in the *samā’*] so that perchance a particle of this reality may appear:²⁴

That idol-*shāhid* whose love is in the core of our soul—
His exile is pain and his union is our balm and remedy
And his face is religion and the *qibla*; His tresses is infidelity and unbelief—
Without a doubt he is both infidelity and faith.²⁵

‘Ayn al-Qudāt’s witnessing of this “beautiful form” or Muḥammad’s vision of the divine is labelled *tamaththul* (or likeness),²⁶ which is a clear reference back

²¹ Ibid., 303.

²² Ibid., 294, 321.

²³ Ibid., 321.

²⁴ This sentence alludes to a practice found in some Sufi *samā’*s when the singer and the *shāhid* were the same person. Sometimes, the *shāhid* was dressed up in special clothes, perhaps as Ritter suggests, as an “ascetic test of strength” (*The Ocean of the Soul*, 512). Ritter provides three examples of singers also being the *shāhid* at a *samā’*: “Religious Love of a Beautiful Person,” 513. It is perhaps worthwhile stating that it seems ‘Ayn al-Qudāt endorsed the practice of *samā’* and dancing, indeed at one point he states that he and his father were dancing (*raqṣ kardīm*) with a group of town leaders. In the same session his father witnessed Aḥmad Ghazālī dancing with them (*Tamhīdāt*, 250–1).

²⁵ *Tamhīdāt*, 321.

²⁶ The expression used is *‘ālam-i tamaththul*, which shows that ‘Ayn al-Qudāt considered this an ontological realm, which was explicated in greater detail by Ibn ‘Arabī a century later. For Ibn

to the Qur'an where the term is used with reference to the angel Gabriel—who is associated with the spirit.²⁷ To illustrate his point, and moving from Gabriel to God, he cites the *ḥadīth*: “Truly, God created Adam and his children in the form of the Merciful.”²⁸ Thus, *tamaththul* is discussed by ‘Ayn al-Qudāt in conjunction with the *shāhid*, or the witness, because it denoted the likeness of God that was contemplated during the vision of the spirit, which as argued above, pertains to both the individual and God. From this perspective the witness and the witnessed are the same, even if rationality dictates otherwise:

Since the love of the witness and the witnessed are one, the witness is the witnessed and the witnessed is the witness. You consider this a form of *ḥulūl* but it is not, it is the perfection of unity (*iṭṭihād*) and oneness (*yigānigī*).²⁹

The witness and witnessed are one in truth, but they appear many with regard to describing and alluding [to them] ... if you consider well, sometimes we are his witness and sometimes he is our witness. In one way he is the witness and we are the witnessed and in another way we are the witness and he is the witnessed.³⁰

Although ‘Ayn al-Qudāt’s attention is focused on understanding God through witnessing the spirit within, as suggested above there are occasions when the witness may be viewed through other human beings:

A share [may be] obtained for hearts of real witness-playing (*shāhid-bāzī*) in a metaphorical witness (*shāhid-i majāzī*) who has a fair face. This is the reality of *tamaththul*. It can be [manifested] in a fair form ... But do not suppose that I speaking of love of the self, which is [nothing but] lust, rather, I am speaking of love of the heart, and this love of the heart is rare.³¹

The kind of argumentation offered by ‘Ayn al-Qudāt’s was rejected by many religious scholars because such ideas violated their conception of *tawḥīd*, God’s unity, in which the chasm between creator and created could not be bridged. Yet, the ultimate agency of God, so important in Ash‘arite theology is preserved by ‘Ayn al-Qudāt as a necessary corollary of the annihilation of the ego. His Sufi

‘Arabī on *tamaththul* (or imaginalization) see Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn ‘Arabī*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton University Press, 1969), 179–215. ‘Ayn al-Qudāt uses the idea of *tamaththul* to explain the states of the afterlife, and the phenomena that appear there (288–90).

²⁷ Gabriel is referred to in 19:17: “We sent to her [Mary] Our Spirit [Gabriel], and he appeared to her in the likeness (*fa-tamaththala*) of a mortal without fault.” For ‘Ayn al-Qudāt and Gabriel as a *tamaththul* see *Tamhidāt*, 293–4.

²⁸ Ibid., 296.

²⁹ Ibid., 115.

³⁰ Ibid., 295.

³¹ Ibid., 297.

tawḥīdī world view eroded a “normative” perspective that was based upon a basic duality between creator and created. The accusation of “*ḥulūl-ism*” hovers beneath the surface in much of the *Tamhīdāt*, and indeed, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s fear for his safety as a result of challenging “normative” Islam were legitimate as he was executed at the tragically young age of thirty-three.³²

II. The *Shāhid* Controversy

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s *Tamhīdāt* provides ample evidence of the danger that his kind of world view provided. Indeed, the controversy was generations old as several theologians had voiced their opposition to the practice in the tenth century. Al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/936) was explicit about the connection between the concept of *ḥulūl*, witnessing God in creatures and beautiful men, Sufi ascetics, and casting aside the sacred law (*sharī‘a*).³³ The practice was condemned by subsequent generations of scholars, including the historian al-Muqaddasī (writing in about 355/966),³⁴ and ‘Abd al-Qādir Baghdādī (d. 429/1038).³⁵ Many of the major Sufis also voiced concerns about *shāhid-bāzī*. One of the first was Hujwīrī (d. ca. 467/1075) who had expressed his worry about the practice of “looking at youths” which he claimed was rejected by all genuine Sufi masters, but the adherents of incarnation (*ḥulūliyyān*)—a group that he believed were not genuine Sufis—seem to have endorsed the practice, and this had left a stigma on the friends of God.³⁶ In the generation subsequent to Hujwīrī one of the most important opponents of *shāhid-bāzī* was Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 504/1111), whose significance for the burgeoning Sufi tradition was his correlation between Islamic spirituality and “normative” Islam with Sufism in his *magnum opus*, the *Iḥyā’ ulūm al-dīn* (“Revivication of the Religious Sciences”).

That Ghazālī was concerned about *shāhid-bāzī* is evident from his writings related to the Sufi ritual of the *samā’*, and in one fatwa he stated that the name Sufi disappears when the “Sufi” sits with a young lad, performs the *samā’* with him, and when he loves him and they talk to each other much.³⁷ In addition, in his chapter on *samā’* in his *Kīmīyā-yi sa‘ādat*, Ghazālī expressed reservations about men and women who wore Sufi garments in pretence and engaged in Sufi

³² For the circumstances behind ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s execution, see Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, 110–15; and Firoozeh Papan-Matin, *Beyond Death: The Mystical Teachings of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī* (Leiden: Brill 2010), 28–39.

³³ Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, 121.

³⁴ See Sara Sviri, “Hakīm Tirmidhī and the Malāmātī Movement,” in *Classical Persian Sufism*, 591.

³⁵ Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy*, 121.

³⁶ *The Kashf al-Mahjūb*, trans. R.A. Nicholson (London: Luzac & Co, 1911), 416–7.

³⁷ Fatwa included in N. Pūrjavādī, *Dū Mujaddid* (Tehran: Nashr-i Dānishgāh, 2002), 90.

practices such as *shāhid-bāzī*. He complained that these individuals excused themselves by saying things like, “Our *pīr* glanced at so and so a lad, and this has always been the way of the eminent ones. This is not sodomy (*līwāṭat*), rather it is *shāhid-bāzī*.” He added, “Perhaps they say, ‘It is the same as spirit-playing (*‘ayn-i rūḥ-bāzī*).’”³⁸ In the context of *samā‘* and *shāhid-bāzī*, Ghazālī also discussed the possibility of the essence of angels and the spirits of the prophets taking a form or likeness (*mithālī*) of a beautiful-looking human.³⁹ He stated that once the spiritual unveiling had terminated, the Sufi who had witnessed the *mithāl* would occasionally seek a form which was suitable or close to that spiritual likeness in order to regain that lost mystical state. Ghazālī claimed that this effort was permissible, however, he lamented at the individual who had no knowledge of the divine secrets, but had an inclination to a person that he supposed possessed the spiritual attribute that he was seeking.⁴⁰

This controversy would have been familiar to ‘Ayn al-Qudāt if only for the reason that his own master, the celebrated Persian Sufi, Aḥmad Ghazālī—the brother of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī—had a reputation for *shāhid-bāzī*. His exploits were detailed by Shams-i Tabrīzī (Rūmī’s spiritual mentor) at least one-hundred years after the death of Ghazālī.⁴¹ Shams portrayed Aḥmad Ghazālī in a series of episodes in which he appears in compromising situations with young males. However, Shams’ intention in these stories is to vindicate Aḥmad Ghazālī who demonstrates that his actions have secret meanings, and thus it is necessary that his followers do not doubt his spiritual motives. Spiritual masters must be obeyed at all times. Even if Shams’ “shocking” stories about Aḥmad Ghazālī’s *shāhid-bāzī* were merely fabrications with the sole purpose of yielding this spiritual teaching, there is much textual evidence to indicate that *shāhid-bāzī* was quite a common practice. The promotion of a sensual or carnal type of *shāhid-bāzī* has been observed in the writings of a number of well-known Persian texts, including the *Qābūs-nāma*, and in the works of ‘Umar Khayyām and Sa’dī⁴² (although the ambiguity of the sensual-spiritual

³⁸ *Kīmīyā-yi sa’ādat* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i ‘Ilmī va Farhangī, 1361/1982–3), 2:486.

³⁹ It is interesting to note that Ghazālī chose to illustrate his argument with reference to Gabriel’s appearance to the prophet in the likeness of Daḥya Kalbī, the handsome Arab male—the very same example provided by ‘Ayn al-Qudāt (*Tamhīdāt*, 294).

⁴⁰ *Kīmīyā-yi sa’ādat*, 487.

⁴¹ Nasrollah Pourjavady, “Stories of Ahmad al-Ghazali Playing the Witness,” in *Reason and Inspiration in Islam*, ed. Todd Lawson (London, I.B. Tauris, 2005), 200–20.

⁴² Mino S. Southgate has noted how the works of Sa’dī include both spiritual versions of the *shāhid*, and also more secular and sensual offerings. See “Men, Women, and Boys: Love and Sex in the Works of Sa’dī,” *Iranian Studies* 17.4 (1984): 413–52.

nature of love in some of these works inevitably yield contrary views).⁴³ The ideal *shāhid*, according to Schimmel is a boy of fourteen,⁴⁴ whose liminal physical appearance is both male, yet “softened” by beardless cheeks offering, perhaps, a female dimension.⁴⁵ Liminality and ambiguity were certainly key elements in the presentation of the *shāhid* in Persian poetry, for the undefined status of the *shāhid* (male/female, divine/secular) permitted a degree of transgression and sedition against the normative values expressed in society. It is possible that such unconventional expressions and behaviour were utilised by Sufis too, in promoting their own spiritual progress. This theme shall be addressed further in the next section.

III. Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī

By Kirmānī's time the literary tradition, if not the actual practice of *shāhid-bāzī*, was well established, which makes the controversy surrounding Awḥad al-Dīn appear a little peculiar. Awḥad al-Dīn Ḥamid b. Abī l-Fakhr-i Kirmānī was one of the most eminent Sufis of the thirteenth century who moved in elite Sufi circles. His associates form a veritable “who's who” of Sufis in the first half of the thirteenth century: these include Ibn ‘Arabī, Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, Shams-i Tabrīzī, Sa’d al-Dīn Ḥammūya, Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, and Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar Suhrawardī. Kirmānī's own spiritual genealogy leads back to several of the Sufi masters who had written about or been associated with *shāhid-bāzī* (see fig. 1). Awḥad al-Dīn was trained in Sufism by a well-known and demanding master, Rukn al-Dīn Sujāsī,⁴⁶ who in turn had been nurtured by Quṭb al-Dīn Abḥarī, a student of the celebrated master Abū l-Najīb Suhrawardī. Some have regarded Kirmānī a disciple (*murīd*) of Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar Suhrawardī (who was the spiritual mentor of the Abbasid caliph, al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh).⁴⁷

⁴³ It is interesting to compare Southgate with Leonard Lewisohn who appears to read Sa’d only through a mystical lens. See his “Prolegomenon,” 46–7, 71 n. 362.

⁴⁴ Annemarie Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade: The Imagery of Persian Poetry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 97.

⁴⁵ Leonard Lewisohn summarises and agrees with the arguments of M. Isti’lāmī that the *shāhid* (in particular, as understood by Ḥāfiẓ) is female. See his “Prolegomenon,” n. 356. While this may be true in relation to Ḥāfiẓ, it seems to me that the *shāhid* according to Kirmānī was male. The reason for this is that in the discussion of the *shāhid* in his poetry, the witness is the subject of contemplation during the *samā’*, when females were largely excluded (see the *Manāqib* which relates how Kirmānī's disciples refused permission for female participation in the *samā’*—see note 96 below.

⁴⁶ See B. Furūzānfar, “Introduction,” 18.

⁴⁷ *The Tadhkiratu ‘Sh-Shu‘ara (Memoirs of the Poets) of Dawlatshāh Bin ‘Alā’u’d-Dawla Bakhtishāh al-Ghāzī of Samarqand*, ed. E.G. Browne (London: Luzac & Co, 1901), 210, 223.

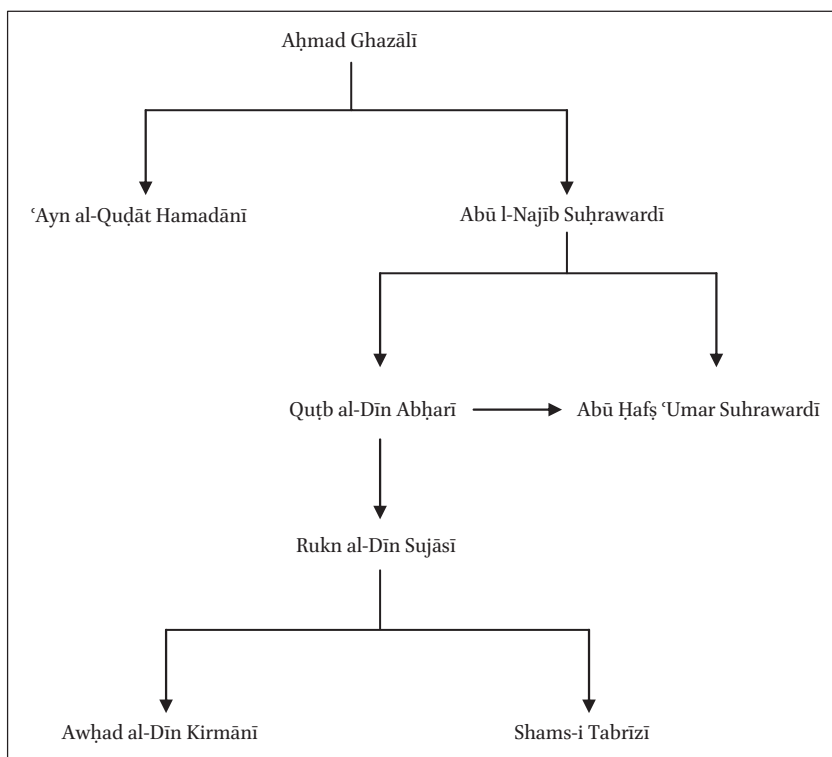


Figure 1. The Spiritual Lineage of Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī

This may have been possible, given that the two lived in Baghdad in the same period, and that Kirmānī's hagiography and other documents portray how the *shāhid-bāz* regarded Suḥrawardī with the utmost respect. Such a possibility is worth considering because it was to Kirmānī that the prestigious directorship of the large Marzubāniyya *ribāṭ* was given after the death of Suḥrawardī. (The Marzubāniyya *ribāṭ* had been built for Suḥrawardī by the caliph al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh, and it included a large hall, a bath and garden.)⁴⁸ Kirmānī was awarded the post of director of the *ribāṭ* by the caliph al-Mustaṣhir bi-llāh (r. 624–39/1227–42), who was considered his follower (*murīd*).⁴⁹ The caliph

⁴⁸ See the *al-Ḥawādith al-jāmi'a wa-l-tajārib al-nāfi'a fi l-mi'a al-sābi'a*, attributed to Ibn al-Fuwaṭī (d. 723/1323), ed. Maḥdī al-Najm (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2003), 72.

⁴⁹ *The Tadhkiratu 'Sh-Shu'ara*, 210.

also made him the *shaykh al-shuyūkh*, a term used to denote the leading Sufi shaykh of a city.⁵⁰

Despite the prestige and eminence that Kirmānī enjoyed there are indications that his relationship with Suhrawardī was not always cordial. This shall be discussed in due course. But as a master in his own right, Kirmānī attracted his own following of dervishes: Furūzānfar lists the names of seventeen of his deputies (*khulafā*), while Bayram presents the case for twenty-eight.⁵¹ Kirmānī's own form of Sufism appears to have been very arduous. He was a proponent of travelling to seek knowledge, and he met the spiritual masters of the age in the regions of Iran, Iraq, Khorasan, Turkey, Azerbaijan and Egypt, and his own poetry refers to his travels:

Awḥad! You knock at the heart's door, but where is the heart?
 You have spent a life wandering, but where is the home?⁵²
 How long will you boast of isolation and those who engage in seclusion?
 You completed seventy-two seclusions, but where is the result?⁵³

The above verse refers to seclusion (*chilla*) which was a particular form of Sufi spiritual exercise, when the dervish would undertake a period of forty days for uninterrupted prayer and contemplation. If the number of seventy-two

⁵⁰ *Manāqib*, 241, 243.

⁵¹ See Furūzānfar, "Introduction," 44–6; and Bayram, *Şeyh Evhadü'd-Din*, 85–114. One of Kirmānī's disciples seems to have been the author of three treatises which have been translated by William Chittick, and published under the general title of *Faith and Practice of Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992). This is because a certain Nāṣir al-Dīn is mentioned on a manuscript of one of the treatises, and he is also mentioned by Aflākī (*The Feats of the Knowers of God*, trans. John O'Kane [Leiden: Brill, 2002], 130–2) as the author of *Clarifications* (the title of one of the treatises). (In O'Kane's translation of Aflākī, however, the word *tabṣīrat* is not rendered as a book title [*Clarifications*], but rather as a spiritual quality possessed by the individual, i.e. "enlightenment"). The reason for believing that the author was a disciple of Kirmānī's is because the latter's verses are quoted more than any other named poet, and he is referred to in reverential terms. Chittick believed that the author may have been Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, although he is now undecided. For the identity of this author see Chittick, *Faith and Practice*, 255–9. The mystery of the authorship of the work is not so important in the context of this article; however, Aflākī's story about Shaykh Nāṣir al-Dīn becomes all the more significant if Nāṣir al-Dīn was indeed a disciple of Kirmānī. This is because Rūmī accused him of being a catamite (*hiz*): "In the end, it happened that he [Nāṣir al-Dīn] would secretly pay something to sodomites so they would have their way with him" (*Feats of the Knowers of God*, 131). It is worth speculating that Rūmī may have made associations between the catamite (Nāṣir al-Dīn) and the *shāhid-bāzī* of his master, Kirmānī, especially given Rūmī's ambiguous statements about Kirmānī. It is strange though, that a disciple by the name of Nāṣir (or Naṣir) does not appear in Kirmānī's hagiography, nor is he mentioned in Furūzānfar's "Introduction" where he lists Kirmānī's disciples (45–6).

⁵² For his travels, see Furūzānfar, "Introduction," 23–33.

⁵³ See Maḥbūb, *Dīwān*, no. 1716, 304; cited also by Dawlatshāh, *The Tadhkiratu 'Sh-Shu'ara*, 210.

chillas is to be taken at face-value, Kirmānī would have spent a total of just under eight years of his life engaged in this practice.

Another facet of Kirmānī's Sufism that requires much further study concerns his understanding of the world view of Ibn 'Arabī, for the two enjoyed exceptionally warm relations (which shall be discussed below). Given this, it might be expected that Kirmānī would have been sympathetic, if not a proponent, of the Great Shaykh's sophisticated and elaborate ontology. This is difficult to verify with any certainty because Kirmānī did not compose any treatise (at least, none that can be attributed to him) that discusses his world view.

Although he bequeathed nothing substantial in prose, as a poet of prodigious creativity, Kirmānī left behind a *dīwān* comprising 1731 quatrains.⁵⁴ As with the manuscripts of many medieval Persian poets, this *dīwān* includes some quatrains that were probably composed by other poets, and this only adds to the problematic task of proving the influence of Ibn 'Arabī upon Kirmānī by an analysis of this poetry.⁵⁵ His quatrains contain themes that were all too common in the Persian Sufi world of the thirteenth century, although there are some on the theme of *shāhid-bāzī* that perhaps bear a certain stamp of Kirmānī's originality. The quatrains do not lend themselves to easy analysis, especially as contrary messages appear in some of these. Compare the following two quatrains in which the first points to a sensual *shāhid* but who is not the object of desire or joy, with the second that appears to celebrates the physical *shāhid* over the divine:

There is no share of joy for us tonight,
 That beloved of mine is not among us tonight.
 Even though there is a *samā'*, candle[s] and a witness (*shāhid*)
 The root of everything is connection to him, and he is not here tonight!⁵⁶

Don't suppose that I'm dancing [to show my] skill,
 Or that I'm dancing out of delight or [some mystical] message.
 Don't even think that this dance of mine is [inspired by the] divine.
 I am dancing because of such [a beautiful] boy!⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Furūzānfar did not consider these quatrains as possessing the same literary qualities as those attributed to his contemporaries in the Sufi world. See his comments in his "Introduction," 48.

⁵⁵ Peter Lamborn Wilson sees the development of Ibn 'Arabī's ideas in a group of ten quatrains that he has selected and grouped under the term "The Heart's Witness" (*Heart's Witness*, 18). However, those familiar with the ecstatic love poetry in the Persian tradition would be familiar with quatrains from other Sufis at a similar point in time with the same message. Ibn 'Arabī's influence on Kirmānī's quatrains cannot be verified in Wilson's selection.

⁵⁶ Maḥbūb, *Dīwān-i ruba'iyāt*, 275, no. 1475.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 273–4, no. 1464.

The dissonance between the two verses may be explained by the Malāmātī legacy on Persian Sufism.⁵⁸ The Malāmātīs were individuals who sought to draw close to God by a rigorous examination of their *nafs* (soul) and who attempted to rid themselves of any trace of hypocrisy in their devotional activities. To this end the Malāmātīs refrained from public acts of piety in case this nurtured sentiments of spiritual pride. Indeed, Hujwīrī related that some individuals of this group would perform disreputable acts (“neither a great sin nor a trivial offence”)⁵⁹ in order that people would blame them. The aim of this was to censure the *nafs* so that the individual would be aware constantly of his or her own selfish ego and therefore act so that hypocrisy and pride were kept at bay. Although the great Malāmātī exemplars died well before Kirmānī’s time, the legacy of their teachings was absorbed within the general Sufi world view. It is from this perspective that Kirmānī’s second quatrain cited above conforms to the more spiritual message that is usually apparent in his quatrains.

Despite his travels, his attraction to demanding spiritual and ascetic exercises, his performance of the *samāʿ* and composition of poetry, and his fondness for *shāhid-bāzī*, Kirmānī managed to find time for a family life. He was married to the great grand-daughter of Abū l-Najīb Suhrawardī. (Suhrawardī married his daughter to Quṭb al-Dīn Abharī, who in turn married his daughter to his disciple Rukn al-Dīn Sujāsī, who married his daughter to Kirmānī.⁶⁰ This meant that the spiritual lineage from Suhrawardī to Kirmānī was fortified by constructing family connections.) Kirmānī fathered three children; a son and two girls.⁶¹

IV. Criticisms of Kirmānī

(A). *Kirmānī and the Maqālāt of Shams-i Tabrīzī*

In the hagiography of the fifteenth-century Sufi ‘Abd al-Raḥman Jāmī (d. 901/1496), it is stated that Shams-i Tabrīzī was a student of Rukn al-Dīn Sinjāsī (which is most likely the same Rukn al-Dīn Sujāsī who was Kirmānī’s

⁵⁸ I am particularly grateful to Dr. Lewisohn for bringing my attention to this point.

⁵⁹ Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, 67.

⁶⁰ *Manāqib*, 59–60.

⁶¹ One of these daughters, Aymana, seems to have been intellectually gifted, and the *Manāqib*, 60–2, relates how Kirmānī agreed to hand over her education to Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar Suhrawardī. The other daughter born from a concubine, was called Fāṭima, on whom see *Manāqib*, 68–71; M. Bayram, *Şeyh Evhadü’l-Din*, 50–6; and idem, *Fatma Bacı ve Bâciyân-ı Rum* (İstanbul: Nüve Kültür Merkezi, 2008).

spiritual guide).⁶² It is possible, therefore, that Shams met Kirmānī when they were both disciples at the same time, under the same guide. Even though Shams himself does not mention Sujāsī in his own writings, there are five references to Kirmānī. These anecdotes are among the earliest references to Kirmānī, since Shams' *Maqālāt* was recorded sometime before 645/1247. In one of the stories Kirmānī took Shams to a *samā'*, and said to him "Why don't we be together?" Shams replied that they could be together if they sat down and Kirmānī would drink in front of the disciples, while Shams would refrain. When asked why he would not drink, Shams replied, "Because you would be the corruptor (*fāsiqī*) yet the fortunate one (*nīkbakht*), but I would be the corruptor and unfortunate (*badbakht*)."⁶³ Kirmānī's corruption referred to by Shams may relate to breaking the law by imbibing wine, and his good fortune lay in his association with Shams. This stands in contrast to Shams, whose association with a wine-drinking Sufi (and connection with someone who was, perhaps, linked with sensual *shāhid-bāzī*) rendered him a corruptor and unfortunate because of his companionship with the latter.

Shams mentioned Kirmānī another time in the *Maqālāt* in a less than flattering fashion, in an observation that "Awḥad was closer to the completion of caprice." According to Shams, caprice was the lowest of four kinds of "drunkenness": these are the drunkenness of caprice, of the spiritual world, of God's road, and drunkenness in God.⁶⁴ Shams also referred to Kirmānī's "imaginings," yet it is difficult to determine whether a criticism of the *shāhid-bāz* is intended in his observation that "before knowledge, [the imaginings] take to misguidance. After that there's knowledge. After knowledge there are imaginings that are correct and very good. After that the eyes open."⁶⁵ (Parallels may be drawn with Shams' opinions with those of Ghazālī concerning spiritual witnessing discussed above.)

However, there are indications that Shams' disparaging view of Kirmānī may have been caused by issues other than *shāhid-bāzī*. The first of these is Kirmānī's penchant for observing *chilla* which has already been mentioned. Kirmānī's predilection for *chilla* was nothing exceptional in medieval Sufi circles, as it was an exercise discussed and no doubt practiced by most of the Sufis

⁶² Jāmi, *Nafahāt al-uns*, ed. M. 'Ābidī (Tehran: Ittīlā'āt, 1370/1990–1), 466. On Shams' spiritual mentors see Franklin Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 145–54.

⁶³ *Me & Rumi: The Autobiography of Shams-i Tabrizi*, trans. William Chittick (Louisville, Ky.: Fons Vitae, 2004). The Persian text is given in Furūzānfar's introduction to the *Manāqib*, 40.

⁶⁴ *Me & Rumi*, 116–8.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 72. Chittick is also cautious about the nature of the Shams words, and says this "seems to be a critical reference to Awḥad al-Dīn" (*ibid.*, 319 n. 67).

in his time, such as ‘Azīz Nasafī,⁶⁶ Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar Suhrawardī⁶⁷ and also Rūmī.⁶⁸ However, Shams appears to have been the exception to the rule, as in the *Maqālāt* he railed against the practice, commenting that it was an “innovation in the religion of Muḥammad. Muḥammad never sat in forty-day seclusion.”⁶⁹ Shams appeared to have held that seclusion for a number of forty nights was a rather arbitrary figure, for he claimed that when in the presence of the perfect shaykh “you will have a permanent seclusion without sitting in seclusion. A state will come over you such that you will always be in seclusion.”⁷⁰ In other words, finding and serving the perfect shaykh was the pinnacle of the Sufi path, a perspective that dovetails neatly with the anecdote of Shams and Kirmānī, and their drinking wine together, which Shams had already expressed in his didactic tale that illustrated the obedience that was required of a Sufi novice.

Aside from the difference of opinion relating to Sufi practices, the negativity manifested by Shams towards Kirmānī may also be attributable to Shams’ own irascible personality. Shams’ unpopularity among Rūmī’s followers is well-known (which resulted in his departure from Konya before his return and probable murder). He also held some very negative views of female Sufis, and his arrogance (or self-belief in his spiritual prowess—depending upon how he is viewed) is evident in his own prayer when he asked God: “Is there not a single created being among Thy elect who could endure my company?”⁷¹ The only person able to endure Shams was Rūmī—this being the case, his remarks about and criticisms of Kirmānī must be taken with some caution.

A third possible reason for Shams’ generally critical opinion of Kirmānī may be related to spiritual rivalry, as the two may have been vying for the attention of Rukn al-Dīn Sujāsī when they were learning the Sufi path. Of course this is only speculative, and it has yet to be confirmed that Shams was indeed a student of Sujāsī.

(B). *Kirmānī and Aflākī*

Shams’ condescending attitude towards Kirmānī is also reflected in an anecdote related by Aflākī, and which has a direct bearing on the practice of *shāhid-bāzī*. Aflākī (d. 761/1360) was the author of a voluminous hagiography of the

⁶⁶ ‘Azīz Nasafī, *Insān-i kāmīl*, ed. M. Molé (Tehran/Paris: Maisonneuve, 1962) 102–110.

⁶⁷ See Erik S. Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition: ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī and the Rise of the Islamic Mystical Brotherhoods* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 220–2.

⁶⁸ See Annemarie Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun* (London: East-West Publications, 1980), 16.

⁶⁹ *Me and Rumi*, 147.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁷¹ Cited in Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 20.

early Mevlevi Sufis which included reports of encounters between Shams and Kirmānī. In one of these Shams came across Kirmānī in Baghdad, and the latter was gazing at the reflection of the moon in a bowl of water. Shams criticised him, saying “Unless you have a boil on your neck, why don’t you look at it in the sky?” The anecdote then continued to relate Kirmānī’s request that they be together (which as noted above was related by Shams in the *Maqālāt*) and Shams agreed on the condition that they drink wine in public. Interestingly, Kirmānī refused even though Shams said that he too would drink (contrary to the version in the *Maqālāt*), which suggests that in Aflākī’s version at least, Kirmānī upholds the *sharī’a*, but this enables Shams to belittle Kirmānī for not being able to follow the true spiritual guide, just like Moses’ inability to perceive the reality of Khidr (which is based on Qur’an 18:65–82).⁷²

Aflākī also reported the opinions of Rūmī. He related that one day in Rūmī’s presence there was a discussion about Kirmānī, to the effect that he was a *shāhid-bāz*, although he staked his all (*pāk-bāz*) and never did anything wrong.” However, Rūmī stated, “*kāshki kardī wa gudhashtī*.”⁷³ This is a rather ambiguous statement and may be interpreted in a number of ways. The two verbs in the sentence, derived from *kardan* and *gudhashtan*, are used frequently and have many meanings. *Kardan* has twenty-five meanings listed in one of the most authoritative Persian dictionaries, from doing something to having sexual relations.⁷⁴ *Gudhashtan* has seventeen meanings in the same dictionary, and these range from something or someone moving past something to forgiving someone.⁷⁵ Thus, the elasticity of Rūmī’s statement may offer those doubting Kirmānī’s spiritual integrity an interpretation such as, “He should have had sexual relations and then he should have moved on,” that is to say, put the act behind him. Those who are more prepared to defend Kirmānī’s name may read Rūmī’s words as, “Would he had done something [to advance his spiritual station] and then gone beyond it (or surpassed it).” Indeed Aflākī added that Rūmī then cited the following verse: “Oh brother, [God’s] court is infinite, Wherever you reach, by God, do not stop there.”⁷⁶ In the *Nafahāt al-uns*, the famous hagiography by Jāmī such an apologetic interpretation of *shāhid-bāzī* appears in the biographical entry for Kirmānī, in which Rūmī’s enigmatic comment is explained through Kirmānī’s own quatrain:

⁷² See Aflākī, *The Feats of the Knowers of God*, 423–4.

⁷³ Ibid., 303.

⁷⁴ Ḥasan Anwarī, *Farhang-i buzurg-i sukhān*, 8 vols. (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-yi Millī, 1381/2002–3). The entry for *kardan* appears in 6:5785–6.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 6:6091–2.

⁷⁶ Also found in *Feats of the Knowers of God*, 302–3.

With the eyes of the head we witness forms
 Because the trace of [any] meaning [must] appear in a form.
 This world is a form and we [have the shape] of figures
 One can only see the meaning [behind the figures] through the form.⁷⁷

In other words, the ideal *shāhid-bāz* looks through forms to the meaning, the spirit, that animates the universe, and which has its origin in God.⁷⁸

Aflākī's treatment of Kirmānī through the accounts relating to Shams and Rūmī are at best ambiguous. He may have faithfully reported what he had heard about Kirmānī from his sources, although the reliability of these cannot always be ascertained. Despite this, the sting of Shams' tongue, as reported by Aflākī, reflects the same acerbic wit and vitriol that is apparent in the *Maqālāt*. Shams' venom was not simply directed at Kirmānī, young males and the *samāʿ*, rather he was also advocating the pre-eminence of the guide. Rūmī's comments are open to interpretation given their equivocal nature.

(C). *Kirmānī and Suhrawardī*

It would be reasonable to assume that the position of *shaykh al-shuyūkh* and the guardianship of one of the most prestigious *ribāṭs* in Baghdad would only have been awarded to an individual who did not court controversy or display moral laxity. However, the complexities of politics and intrigues of personal relationships never make for easy assumptions. The intricacies behind the caliph's offer to Kirmānī of these posts may be lost in history, and it is only possible to speculate on various scenarios that account for Kirmānī's rise to pre-eminence. The first of these is that in his own time Kirmānī was perceived as an advocate of spiritual *shāhid-bāzī*, and only at a later period after his death was he associated with a more sensual and reproachable version. This might account for the ambivalent attitude to him displayed in Aflākī's work. Shams' aversion was not related to homoerotic *shāhid-bāzī* per se; after all, he took pains to praise Aḥmad Ghazālī's antics with a handsome lad.

Certainly, Kirmānī's rise in Baghdad caused some unrest, especially in ʿImād al-Dīn, (d. 655/1257; the son of Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar Suhrawardī), who on his father's death had assumed that he would succeed his father's position.⁷⁹ The reason for the caliph elevating Kirmānī over ʿImād al-Dīn is not entirely clear. However, the choice of Kirmānī may have been natural given that he must have

⁷⁷ *Nafahāt al-uns*, 588; and Maḥbūb, *Dōwān-i rubaʿiyāt*, 234, no. 1153.

⁷⁸ Jāmī's entry for Kirmānī does not add anything original, and simply summarises in an uncritical fashion most of the material relating to Kirmānī from previous authors, such as Simnānī and Aflākī.

⁷⁹ See *Manāqib*, 244–5.

had a significant following and reputation. Kirmānī was sixty-three years old at the time when appointed the *shaykh al-shuyūkh*, whereas ‘Imād al-Dīn was fifty-two; the deference to age may have contributed to the caliph’s decision. In addition, the caliph may have been attempting to assert his own authority and distance himself from the Suhrawardī heritage.⁸⁰

Kirmānī himself, as portrayed in the *Manāqib*, had a high opinion of Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar Suhrawardī, indeed, the latter is referred to in reverential terms. The *Manāqib* describes a *samā’* in which the two great Sufis were present, and Kirmānī enjoyed ecstatic moments; Suhrawardī’s presence may be seen as an endorsement of Kirmānī’s practice of *samā’* and his mystical unveiling.⁸¹ There is also an anecdote in which Kirmānī praised four outstanding individuals, one of whom was Suhrawardī; according to Kirmānī, Suhrawardī did not do anything contrary to God’s demands for the whole of his life.⁸² Yet caution must be observed with these anecdotes in this hagiographical work, for as a compilation of episodes that were intended to glorify and magnify the pre-eminence of Kirmānī, its author may have been attempting to appropriate the indisputably great Suhrawardī to further exalt the *shāhid-bāz*.

Suhrawardī’s standing as the caliph’s favourite spiritual mentor and his general influence in Sufi circles would have ensured that Kirmānī would have been familiar with his writings. These works of his, such as the *‘Awārif al-ma’ārif* betray Suhrawardī as a very cautious and “sober” minded Sufi, who was scrupulous in his observance of *sharī’a* law. His perspective on the care that was required of novices and their proper behaviour in the *khānaqāh* is typical, for here the concern is related to *shāhid-bāzī*:

As for the youth, his freedom of movement is restricted to sitting in the common room . . . for when he is exposed to the gaze of others most eyes will inevitably fall on him.⁸³

In contrast was the more colourful and exuberant Kirmānī who gave full reign to his ecstatic experiences in his quatrains:

I am a *shāhid-bāz*! Whoever denies [this practice]
When you look, they too are engaged in this day and night!
When you see them, they are all *shāhid-bāzes*.
They don’t have the courage to deny this.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ See Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 293.

⁸¹ *Manāqib*, 42.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 208.

⁸³ Suhrawardī, *‘Awārif al-ma’ārif*, cited in Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 238.

⁸⁴ Maḥbūb, *Dīwān-i ruba’iyāt*, 225, no. 1075.

Some people accuse me of libertarianism (*ibāḥat*)
 They laugh under their beards and moustaches.
 If Ma'rūf [al-Karkhī], Junayd and Shiblī were alive
 By God, they would approve of my libertarianism.⁸⁵

Kirmānī's passionate poetry, animated with desire for the beloved stands in stark contrast to Suhrawardī's rather dry, didactic Sufi writings. However, much Persian Sufi poetry included features such as hyperbole, exaggeration and the use of erotic and iconoclastic imagery that symbolised the divine beloved to the extent that it became conventional.⁸⁶ Even with due caution observed, it is still the case that the verbal articulations of these two Sufis were poles apart.

It is also necessary to compare the ways both Sufis considered the *samā'*, the ritualised musical concert during which claims of mystical ecstasy were made and which is frequently associated with gazing at young men. Suhrawardī made it explicitly clear that the rules and courtesies needed to be obeyed during its practice, which generally meant that participation (and spectating) was limited to the more advanced Sufis.⁸⁷ From Kirmānī's hagiography it is apparent that the *samā'* was performed on special occasions, when dignitaries (such as famous Sufis) visited a town, and the local population, merchants and men of influence, wished to honour them.⁸⁸ Usually Sufi treatises of the medieval period are careful to warn their readers about the dangers of the *samā'*, that is to say, its performance was to follow certain conditions that made it permissible.

These conditions were discussed by Ghazālī in his *Kīmīyā-yi sa'ādat*. He elaborated on the standard three points that he attributed to Junayd:⁸⁹ the *samā'* must be performed at the right time (*zamān*), at the right place (*makān*) and with the right people (*ikhwān*—lit. brothers). Performing *samā'* at the right time meant that the dervish should not engage in the ritual whenever the heart was engaged in prayer, when eating, or when the heart was disturbed about something. The right place excluded locations such as a tyrant's house

⁸⁵ Ibid., 304, no. 1721.

⁸⁶ Ibn 'Arabī's *Tarjumān al-ashwāq* provides a good example of how these conventions were not always understood by those who were critical of Sufi poetry. Inspired by his encounter with his muse, a beautiful lady from Isfahan, Ibn 'Arabī composed sixty-one Arabic *ghazals*, the sensuous nature of which drew such severe criticisms that he felt compelled to write a commentary that insisted the sensory terminology must be interpreted in a spiritual fashion. See *The Tarjumān al-Ashwāq: A Collection of Mystical Odes*, trans. R.A. Nicholson (London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1911).

⁸⁷ See Ohlander's citation of the 'Awārīf in idem, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 240.

⁸⁸ *Samā's* are mentioned in *Manāqib*, chapters nine, ten, eighteen, thirty, thirty-eight, forty-four, forty-nine, fifty-four.

⁸⁹ Ghazālī, *Kīmīyā-yi sa'ādat*, 497.

or dark and unpleasant spots. Concern with the right people was Ghazālī's major worry and he stated that those present should be the "People of *Samā'*" (in other words, the Sufis), who should not participate when those present included women, youths, those who feign mystical states and dance, the negligent and arrogant, and worldly people.⁹⁰ A last point worthy of consideration is that participants in the *samā'* should bow their heads and not look at each other or glance in other directions, nor should they speak or drink water. They should not move their hands or heads or take it upon themselves to move. In other words, the dervishes should not dance unless they were compelled, as a result of mystical unveiling.⁹¹ The three conditions for observing correct etiquette during the *samā'* are representative of medieval Sufism; the extent to which the practice of Kirmānī accorded with the advice of Ghazālī will become apparent below. (It is not known what "dancing" within the *samā'* actually entailed, such as specific movements of the hands and arms, and legs and feet. Even the ritualised and symbolic spinning of the Mevlevī Sufis probably developed from spontaneous movements of Sufis in Rūmī's own lifetime.)⁹²

The correct rules and manners of the *samā'* did not proscribe the participation of the fair-faced, what was at issue was the spiritual level of the participants. For Suhrawardī, as already seen, this included the observed and the observer. However, the *Manāqib* does not refer to the spiritual level of Kirmānī's handsome-faced partners. For example, the ninth chapter tells how Kirmānī arrived in an unspecified town where the notables agreed to show their esteem for him with a *samā'*:

When the *sama'* began and [the people began] dancing, the shaykh was pleased with [all] the beautiful faces, and he was enraptured (*dhawq kardī*) with them during the *samā'*. They brought over [to him] whoever was better looking in that group, and gave each one a candle.⁹³ The shaykh enjoyed his ecstasy (*wajd*), mystical experience (*hālāt*) and spiritual tasting (*dhawq*). This group of [townspeople] were surprised at his conditions, and each person began to say something, some favourable, and others in condemnation. The judge (*qāḍī*) and the lecturer [of Islamic sciences] (*mudarris*) also expressed opinions and said things in secret [to each other]. The judge said to the lecturer, "The shaykh is happy with this ecstasy, mystical state and spiritual tasting, and it is permissible according to their way and

⁹⁰ Ibid., 497. For more on the *samā'* see Leonard Lewisohn, "The Sacred Music of Islam: *Samā'* in the Persian Sufi Tradition," *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 6 (1997): 1–32; Arthur Gribetz, "The *Samā'* Controversy: Sufi vs Legalist," *Studia Islamica* 74 (1991): 43–62; and F. Shehadi, *Philosophies of Music in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

⁹¹ Ghazālī, *Kimīyā-yi sa'adat*, 498.

⁹² See the comments of Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, 217–8.

⁹³ This seems to have been a particular custom of Awḥad al-Dīn (see *Manāqib*, 149).

custom, but that cloth which has been knotted is not [part of] the ways of poverty, and the shaykh has knotted it over his cloak.⁹⁴

Of interest is not the shaykh's attachment to the beautiful boys, or *shāhids*, but it is the particular method of performing the ritual with a cloth or napkin that was fastened to the cloak. The text does not elaborate on how or where the knot was tied; whether it was tied to his own cloak or whether it fastened the garments of the two dancers together.

A focus on the occasions during which Kirmānī participated in the *samāʿ* suggests that he was quite scrupulous with regard to observing the conditions outlined above. For example, it may be assumed that he did not permit women to participate in the actual performance of *samāʿ*. This is because the *Manāqib* describes the displeasure of Zayn al-Dīn Ṣadaqa (who was one of Kirmānī's favourite disciples)⁹⁵ when a group of female Sufis not only attended, but joined in the *samāʿ*.⁹⁶ If the master's favourite disciple restricted the ritual to males, it is highly likely that the master would have transmitted to him this particular regulation.

Further evidence of Kirmānī's caution relating to the suitability of the participants in the *samāʿ* is evident in an anecdote that describes how he was invited to a *samāʿ* in which a number of impure (*nā-jins*) and dull-minded (*thuqalā*) folk were present. The *Manāqib* relates that the shaykh neither experienced any spiritual expansion, pleasure or tasting and nor did he move around or dance. From the text it is evident that even though the shaykh's inability to enjoy the *samāʿ* was connected to the inappropriate participants, "he allowed them to proceed with the *samāʿ*."⁹⁷ The individual who had organised the event apologised to the shaykh, saying that he not invited those people, who refused to leave. So that the host would not lose face completely, the magnanimous shaykh replied that it was permissible if those people did not depart and persisted in their intrusiveness, because in any case the night would come to an end.

On the whole, Kirmānī's quatrains also advocate the correct courtesy and appropriate Islamic manners, and refer to a spiritual *shāhid* in the *samāʿ*, and that a metaphorical witness (*majāzī*) is permissible in the way of the truth (*rāh-i ḥaqīqī*).⁹⁸ Typical of his perspective is the following:

⁹⁴ *Manāqib*, 40–1.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, see the comments on 208 and 219.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 184–5.

⁹⁷ *Manāqib*, p. 65.

⁹⁸ Maḥbūb, *Dīwān-i rubaʿiyāt*, 276, no. 1483.

Concerning those who are always seeking a *shāhid*
 Do not suppose that they are searching for a form.
 It is a grace when [the form] comforts someone's heart,
 In the language of mystical expressions they call it [a] *shāhid*.⁹⁹

Kirmānī was also keen to stress the need to control sexual appetite, as the following demonstrates:

For donkeys and bulls is sexual appetite (*shahwat-bāzī*)
 You should renounce [it]. That is playing with love (*'ishq-bāzī*).¹⁰⁰
 You are mistaken if you call love "sexual appetite."
 The road from love to sexual appetite is very far.¹⁰¹

He also insists on correct manners for the *samā'*:

Don't suppose that the path of the Truth is for a discourteous person
 Or the task of wailers or those who cause a commotion.
 The courtesy of *samā'* must be observed
 If you don't, then you too are one of the discourteous.¹⁰²

However, there is a hint in the *Manāqib* that Kirmānī's *samā'*s were not always so innocent, as the conditions were not observed all of the time. In one anecdote there is reference to the shaykh's "inclination for the good-looking." These ten to fifteen moon-faced youths (*kudak-i mäh-rū*) were dancing in the *samā'*, during which the shaykh experienced ecstasy and mystical states.¹⁰³ The participation of the young, even if adolescent (*kudak*) implies spiritual immaturity, and therefore it distances Kirmānī's *samā'* from the rule-bound ritual that Suhrawardī endorsed.

The tensions that may have existed between Kirmānī and Suhrawardī were highlighted in an anecdote related by 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī (659–736/1261–1336), the well-known Sufi of the Kubrawiyya order. In his Persian work *Chihil majlis* Simnānī recorded a conversation that he had with a follower of Suhrawardī. This un-named dervish said that he had been present when someone mentioned Kirmānī in front of Suhrawardī who responded by saying, "Do not mention his name in front of me because he is an innovator (*mubtadi'*)." The dervish continued his story and said that when Kirmānī heard of this episode he quipped, "Even though the shaykh [Suhrawardī]

⁹⁹ Ibid., 225, no. 1074.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 207, no. 906.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 897, no. 904.

¹⁰² Ibid., 273, no. 1459.

¹⁰³ *Manāqib*, 212.

has called me an innovator, the pride that my name has passed the shaykh's tongue is sufficient for me." And he then cited an Arabic verse to reinforce his argument:

It does not upset me that you remember me with a disreputable name,
I am just happy that I have passed through your mind.¹⁰⁴

Interestingly, Simnānī (or the unnamed dervish) concluded the episode with the observation "Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn [Suhrawardī] approved of [Kirmānī's] manner (*khulq*) [in his response]."

This anecdote begs the question of the reason behind Suhrawardī's critical opinion of Kirmānī. Unfortunately the dervish who related the episode is unnamed, so it is not possible to re-construct the episode from the perspective of the original narrator. However, the episode appears in a chapter of Simnānī's work in which he is critical of a Sufi called Ḥājjī Āmulī because of the latter's claim that: "Asceticism and spiritual endeavour are [necessary] so that this becomes known: the [divine] commands for this world [exist] for the sake that this world will not be destroyed and that iniquity does not spread among the people . . . The person who realises this is released from the burden of performing [religious] duties."¹⁰⁵ Such an élitist view of spiritual discipline and the relative unimportance accorded to religious duties help to explain why Simnānī included the short anecdote about Suhrawardī and Kirmānī within a chapter that is largely devoted to his encounter with Ḥājjī Āmulī. The kind of Sufism advocated by Ḥājjī Āmulī probably reminded Simnānī of an Islamic world view that he attributed to Ibn 'Arabī. According to Simnānī, Ḥājjī Āmulī related two *ḥadīth*, "Today there was God and there was nothing with Him," and "He is today and as he always was," which "are normally understood to imply an ontological identity between God and the universe."¹⁰⁶ Rather than God existing in splendid isolation, absolute existence abides with everything that was, is and will be, at least in a potential mode. Simnānī cited the very same two *ḥadīth* a few pages earlier in his presentation of Ibn 'Arabī's conception of absolute existence (*wujūd-i muṭlaq*),¹⁰⁷ where he also condemned the Great Shaykh's understanding of absolute existence: "I have explained clearly in [*al-Urwa*] the corruption of his expression (*fiṣād-i qawl-i ū*) that he made about

¹⁰⁴ *Chihil majlis*, ed. Najīb Māyil Harāwī, (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Adīb, 1366/1987–8), 211–12. The episode is also recounted by Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns*, 586, 914.

¹⁰⁵ *Chihil majlis*, 209–10.

¹⁰⁶ Jamal J. Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God: The Life and Thought of 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 27 n. 56.

¹⁰⁷ Chapter 28, 191–7 of *Chihil Majlis* is concerned with this topic.

absolute existence.”¹⁰⁸ Simnānī desired to uphold a position that preserved absolute existence from contamination with the relatively impure conditional existence that characterised being in the world.

Simnānī may have associated Kirmānī with Ibn ‘Arabī and followers of the school attached to him. Indeed, the *Manāqib* includes references to the close relationship that existed between the two. The relationship seems to have started in Konya in 601/1205,¹⁰⁹ and continued over a number of years when they were in the same location in Egypt and Syria.¹¹⁰ Kirmānī and Ibn ‘Arabī appear to have respected and trusted each other to the extent that the latter entrusted the former to educate his step-son, Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, who was instrumental in spreading the world view of Ibn ‘Arabī. Kirmānī agreed to the request, and Qūnawī subsequently spent fifteen to sixteen years in Kirmānī’s companionship.¹¹¹ The reverence that Qūnawī felt for his master is revealed in his desire to be buried on Kirmānī’s prayer mat,¹¹² and also in his observation, “I suckled from the breast of two mothers,” (meaning Kirmānī and Ibn ‘Arabī).¹¹³ That Kirmānī’s esteem for Ibn ‘Arabī was reciprocated is borne out by the trust that the Great Shaykh manifested in leaving his step-son with Kirmānī. Addas has observed that Ibn ‘Arabī must have considered Kirmānī’s practice of *shāhid-bāzī* purely spiritual, otherwise he would not have left him with a boy who was “dearer than a real son.”¹¹⁴

Since Simnānī had grave reservations about aspects of Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought, the former must have considered Kirmānī who was linked with the Great Shaykh with great caution. This does not mean to say that Simnānī simply invented the anecdote in his *Chihil majlis* about Suhrawardī’s apparent negativity towards Kirmānī, but at the very least it is necessary to ask questions about its narrator, and the circumstances surrounding his story. Did Simnānī allude

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 192; [*al*] -‘*Urwa* is a reference to another of Simnānī’s treatises. For more on Simnānī and Ibn ‘Arabī see Hermann Landolt, “Simnānī on *waḥdat al-wujūd*,” in *Wisdom of Persia*, ed. H. Landolt and M. Mohaghegh (Tehran: La branche de Téhéran de l’institut des études islamiques de l’Université McGill, 1971), 91–112.

¹⁰⁹ See Claude Addas, *The Quest for the Red Sulphur* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 229.

¹¹⁰ *Manāqib*, 85–6.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 87.

¹¹² See Chittick, *Faith and Practice of Islam*, 261 n. 13.

¹¹³ *Manāqib*, 87.

¹¹⁴ Addas, *Red Sulphur*, 229. The issue is complicated by the fact that Ibn ‘Arabī had been a vehement opponent of *shāhid-bāzī* in his *Kitāb al-amr al-muḥkam* written in 601/1205. With regard to the practice of *samā‘* he remarked, “As for the use of a ‘witness,’ in other words a young beardless man, this is the most serious of pitfalls and the most immoral form of wickedness,” see ibid., 163–4. Perhaps he changed his mind over time, for certainly he must have been aware of Kirmānī’s self-professed *shāhid-bāzī*, or perhaps, he considered Kirmānī to have other qualities that would compensate when raising his son-in-law.

to his distaste for Kirmānī's type of Sufism before hearing the tale from the un-named follower of Suhrawardī, and thus influence how the story unfolded? Even if the story as related by Simnānī is true, the reason for Suhrawardī's original antipathy for Kirmānī remains unclear. Perhaps Simnānī held reservations about Kirmānī due to the latter's well-known fondness for the *samā'* and *shāhid-bāzī*. While Simnānī did not completely reject the permissibility of *samā'*, he believed that only advanced mystics should participate in it because *samā'* "... is a drug, which if eaten by itself without being prepared together with other good medicines, becomes a deadly poison."¹¹⁵

Conclusion

While there can be no doubt that Kirmānī celebrated and propagated the practice of *shāhid-bāzī* it appears that criticisms of him were due to a number of factors. A close reading of the relevant sources and an investigation into the context of their authors suggests that these Sufis were concerned with advancing their own particular brand of Sufism, both in terms of ritual activity and also theory (where the correct ontological perspective was of primary concern). Such Sufis may also have been aware of the wider historical tradition in which the practice had resulted in accusations of *ḥulūl*. And it should not be forgotten that Sufis were individuals who just like everyone else struggled with jealousies and rivalries. At the same time as reviewing the literature that criticises Kirmānī, the hagiography which serves to sing his praises must also be subject to scrutiny, for the advocate of *shāhid-bāzī* is presented as infallible and beyond reproach. It is interesting that in one of the very last anecdotes, Kirmānī is contrasted with a certain Shaykh 'Alī Ḥarīrī,¹¹⁶ who sat naked with boys in the bath house. If this is not explicit enough, the hagiography proceeds to describe how the boys used to rub and massage him "although he would not

¹¹⁵ Cited by Elias, *The Throne Carrier of God*, 132 n. 59. Elias states that the citation is from a treatise that Simnānī wrote called *Fuṣūl al-uṣūl*. The very same sentence (in Persian) appears in Simnānī's *Mālābud minahī fī l-dīn*, which has been edited and published by Najīb Māyil Harawī in *Muṣannafāt-i fārsī* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī va Farhangī, 1990), 113. Chapter six of this treatise is called "On the *Samā'* and its Conditions," 113–25. Simnānī composed another treatise on the *samā'* called "The Secret of the *Samā'*" (*sirr-i samā'*), which is included in *Muṣannafāt-i fārsī*, 1–6.

¹¹⁶ See Louis Massignon's entry "Ḥarīriyya," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1954–2004), 3:222, in which he says "A sect of Rifā'iyya in the region of Damascus, founded by 'Alī b. Abīl-Ḥasan al-Ḥarīrī al-Marwazī, d. 645/1247 at Baṣar (Ḥawrān). Its excessive pantheism ... was repudiated by Ibn Taymiyya."

get an erection.”¹¹⁷ The text proceeds to describe how the townspeople would bring their sons to him, and he would ask, “Does he have a big arse, this son of yours?” They said, ‘Yes, extremely big!’ And he would ask, ‘Is it worthy of this . . . of mine?’¹¹⁸ Can he endure it?’ They replied, ‘Yes’.” This is clearly more than the usual obedience required of a student for a Sufi shaykh,¹¹⁹ and at the end of the anecdote Kirmānī criticises Shaykh ‘Alī Ḥarīrī as an incomplete master.¹²⁰ The point here is that the hagiographer was at pains to protect the controversial *shāhid-bāz* by projecting into the hagiography a “fall-guy” who received Kirmānī’s censure. However, the hagiography did not present Kirmānī in a completely sanitised fashion, for as mentioned above there are references to Kirmānī dancing with adolescent males (*kudak*), which obviously violated the acceptable Sufi fashion of conducting the *samā’*.

Regardless of the nature of Kirmānī’s *shāhid-bāzī*, rumours and exaggerations related to him can only have contributed to the fascination that Sufism exercised within medieval society. Whether in terms of the practice of *shāhid-bāzī* or the theoretical underpinning of the ritual that God is witnessed in creation, Kirmānī stretched the elasticity of permissible Sufism to a breaking-point as the reaction of a number of thinkers in subsequent generations suggests. Even in the late fifteenth century, some 250 years after Kirmānī’s death, the issue must have remained controversial enough for Jāmī to explain apologetically:

The favourable opinion, or rather the sincere belief [that one should hold] in relation to the group of eminent ones such as Shaykh Aḥmad Ghazālī, Shaykh Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī and Shaykh Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Irāqī . . . who were engaged in contemplating the beauty of sensual forms is that they witnessed the beauty of the absolute Truth in them and did not pay attention to the sensual form. Although some of the great men have denied them, their purpose in this was that the lovers do not make this [*shāhid-bāzī*] a custom, nor compare their experiences to those [of the great shaykhs mentioned above].¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Nudity would have been covered in the bath house and anywhere else for that matter, even with a towel—a point that Kirmānī indirectly makes later in the anecdote (*Manāqib*, 264).

¹¹⁸ Furūzānfar notes that the obvious missing word has been replaced in the manuscript by some dots (*Manāqib*, 263).

¹¹⁹ Caution is always necessary, however, as the following observation comes from Rūmī in his *Fīhi mā fīhi*: “What the shaykh prescribes for you is the same as what the shaykhs of old prescribed, that you leave your wife and children, your wealth and position. Indeed, they used to prescribe for a disciple, ‘Leave your wife, that we may take her,’ and they put up with that.” (Translated by A.J. Arberry as *Discourses of Rumi* (London: John Murray, 1961), 107–8.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 263–4.

¹²¹ Jāmī, *Nafahāt-uns*, 589.



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Men, Women, and Boys: Love and Sex in the Works of SA'DI

Minoo S. Southgate

Comprising some 900 pages in the Furughi edition, the works of Sa'di include a variety of genres. The *Kulliyat* (Complete Works)¹ opens with six "Risalahs" (Homilies), containing orthodox religious and moral teachings. The homilies precede the worldly and anecdotal "Gulistan" (Rose Garden) and the more profound and spiritual "Bustan" (Orchard)--Sa'di's best known works. Next are the "Qasa'id" (Elegies, or Odes) in Persian and Arabic, the "Marasi" (Thronodies), and the "Mulamma'at" (Bilingual poems in Persian and Arabic). The "Tarji'at" (Strophe Poems), the "Tayyibat" (Sweet Poems), the "Badayi'" (Cunning Odes), the "Khavatum" (Gems), and "Ghazaliyyat-i qadim" (Old Sonnets)--altogether 300 pages in the *Kulliyat*--consist mostly of love poems, covering the whole gamut of this emotion from the secular love of women and boys to the mystical love whose object is union with the divine. Miscellaneous shorter pieces appear at the end of the *Kulliyat* under the headings "Sahibiyyah," "Masnaviyyat" (Couplets), "Qata'at" (Short Poems), "Ruba'iyyat" (Quatrains), and "Mufradat" (One-liners). Sa'di is also the author of "Khubsiiyyat va majalis al-hazl" (Impure Things and Facetiae), better known as "Hazliyyat"²--crude pornographic pieces relegated to the end of the *Kulliyat* in manuscripts and early editions, but altogether omitted from the Furughi edition.³ While most Sa'di scholars are somewhat apologetic about the "Hazliyyat," Alessandro Bausani sees these and similar writings as "the

Minoo S. Southgate is Associate Professor of English at Baruch College, City University of New York.

only example of realism in traditional Persian literature...."⁴ Indeed, not only the "Hazliyyat" but also the "Gulistan" and "Bustan" are less stylized and less abstract than most medieval Iranian literature and therefore better guides to life in Iran in Sa'di's time.

Sa'di's education and his extensive travels and long life (born c. 1213-1219, died 1292) enriched his work. His education in religion and the humanities began in his birth place, Shiraz, and continued at the Nizamiyyah of Baghdad. He studied under famous teachers like Shaykh Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi and Shaykh Abu al-Faraj ibn al-Jawzi (the grandson of the great Jawzi).⁶ Extensive travel exposed him to a variety of people and places. In the autobiographic anecdotes of the "Gulistan" and "Bustan" he claims to have visited Mecca, Tabriz, Damascus, Ba'lbak (Heliopolis), Tripoli, Alexandria, Basra, Kufa, the Kish Island, Balkh, Kashghar, Iraq, Syria, Somnath, Ethiopia, and San'a.⁷ Several anecdotes tell of his preaching at the cathedral mosque of Ba'lbak, his fighting in the Crusades, his captivity by the Franks in Aleppo, and his adventure in the pagoda in Somnath, where to save his life he had to kill a man.⁸ Sa'di was a man of his time. A genial observer of his contemporaries, he was not superior to them in his manners and morals.⁹ Among his works are moral tales, Sufi poems, and writings revealing orthodox Muslim beliefs. But he was neither a moralist, nor a Sufi or saint; and he was at times inconsistent. Sometimes his love of humanity transcended nationality, religion, and race:

The sons of Adam are limbs of each other
Having been created of one essence.
When the calamity of life afflicts one limb
The other limbs cannot remain at rest.
If thou hast not sympathy for the troubles of others
Thou are unworthy to be called by the name of a man.¹⁰

And sometimes he shared his contemporaries' religious, racial, and sexual prejudices.¹¹ Judged by J. Rypka to be "one of the most lively and colorful figures in Persian and indeed world literature,"¹² Sa'di created a world that mirrors his time. In the present paper, the *Kulliyat* is examined particularly for the light it sheds on the attitude of Sa'di and his contemporaries toward women, marriage, the love of boys, and mystical love.

Not knowing the composition dates of Sa'di's works aside from the dates of the "Bustan" (1257) and the "Gulistan" (1258), we cannot trace Sa'di's development with certainty. Even the "Bustan" and "Gulistan" existed in draft form for many years and their dates refer merely to the years in which they were put in final form.¹³ We may conjecture, however, that the pornographic writings, the secular love poems, and the homosexual anecdotes of the "Gulistan" were written in the poet's youth, while the homilies, the *Qasidahs*, and the mystical love poems were the fruit of his mature years. This scheme, however, overlooks the fact that in medieval Iran poetry was often governed by convention rather than conviction, and by the demands of the patron rather than the sentiments of the poet. Whatever the order of their composition, the range of Sa'di's works attests to the poet's versatility and his tolerance and broad-mindedness. Moreover, apparently Sa'di's contemporary readers found no incongruity between the autobiographic homosexual episodes of the "Gulistan" or the deliberate obscenity of the "Hazliyyat" on the one hand, and the devout homilies and the religious prologue to the "Bustan" on the other. Such tolerance is absent in medieval Europe and rare even in later periods. Sa'di enjoyed fame and respect in his lifetime and became, in old age, the object of pilgrimage by his devotees.¹⁴ The modern reader is puzzled by the disparity between the orthodox sentiments of the religious writings or the refined passion of the mystical poems on the one hand, and the lustful pornographic pieces on sodomy and seduction of boys on the other. The modern editor resolves the conflict by omitting the latter from the *Kulliyat*. Faced with the same dilemma, English translators even in the tamer episodes of the "Gulistan" turn boys into girls and change anecdotes about pederasty into tales of heterosexual love.¹⁵ Perhaps Sa'di's contemporaries accepted the pornographic with the religious as a reflection of the contrary claims of the body and the soul. They did not attempt to resolve the conflict by sacrificing the body, as medieval Christianity tried to do. In the words of Robert Surieu:

Yearning always for the absolute, and refined by thousands of years of spiritual and artistic striving, the Persian soul is nevertheless very far from despising the ordinary human joys: indeed it displays infinite ingenuity in savouring them in all

their range and variety....[The] greatest poets of Iran accepted and appreciated all the different forms of love, seeing in each of them a fresh means of fulfillment, no matter whether they ran counter to the strict laws of morality or were exalted by the sublimity of their object.¹⁶

Women in Sa'di's Works

Dealing with passionate love for an idealized love object, Sa'di's love poems are conventional, stylized, and abstract, providing little specific information about love relations in his time. Occasionally the beloved is addressed as a boy or youth (*pisar*, *ghulam*, *kudak*, *shahid*). Sometimes a line such as the following identifies the love object as a female:

The beloved's breast in the ringlet of hair
Is an ivory ball couched in an ebony polostick.¹⁷

But in most poems the beloved's sex is not identified, since Persian does not indicate gender and because the poet employs identical stock images to describe the beauty of boys and women. The face is compared to the moon, the eyes to the narcissus, the lips to rubies, the teeth to pearls, and the figure to the cypress or boxwood. Love is passionate and desperate. The speaker idealizes the beloved and complains of his/her cruelty, but the poem remains general and abstract, dealing with the emotion of love rather than attempting to depict a specific lover or beloved in Sa'di's contemporary society. Sa'di's love poems do not reveal how or where lovers met in the sexually segregated Islamic society. They do not individualize the lover or the beloved and give almost no detail by way of a setting. Images of life in Sa'di's contemporary society are much more vivid in the "Gulistan," the "Bustan," and the "Hazliyyat"; but these works treat of the relationship between men and boys and of friendship among men. and say little about heterosexual relationships. Women do not figure prominently in Sa'di's realistic works partly because of their low status in Islamic Iran and partly because they had ceased to be the object of romantic love:

Whether girl, wife or paid concubine, a woman was... confined to the harem and had no social contact with men; she left her house, strictly veiled and guarded, only to go to the baths or to visit her female friends. There was thus no possibility of amorous intrigue, still less of an active love affair.¹⁸

Heterosexual love is singularly absent from the fifth chapter of the "Gulistan," entitled "On Love and Youth," and from the third chapter of the "Bustan," entitled "On Love, Intoxication, and Delirium." These chapters deal, instead, mostly with the mystical or profane love of men for youths, as we shall see later. Sa'di alludes to legendary heterosexual lovers like Laila and Majnun and Farhad and Shirin but includes no anecdotes of passionate love between contemporary men and women.¹⁹ Instead of love, most heterosexual anecdotes in the "Gulistan" and "Bustan" deal with marital discord.

The pornographic pieces reveal extreme hostility toward women. The men in the anecdotes of the "Hazliyyat" show contempt for women and prefer boys, catamites, or other men for sexual relations. If they must have sex with a woman, they prefer anal intercourse.²⁰ As we shall see, the low regard for women observed in Sa'di's work is typical of his time.

The Persian word *zan* (woman, wife) has negative connotations suggesting deficiency, while *mard* (man) and *mardanah* (manly, belonging to men) have positive connotations.²¹ The notion of woman's inferiority to man appears in the Quran itself: "Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property for the support of women. So good women are the obedient."²² The Quran also speaks of woman's cunning. In the sura of Joseph, discovering his wife's falsehood Potiphar exclaims:

"Behold!
It is a snare of you women!
Truly mighty is your snare!"²³

Potiphar's statement is echoed in the Arabic proverb *al-nisa' haba'il al-shaytan* (Women are the devil's snares), and in this verse by Rumi (1207-73):

Verily the snare of women is mighty;
It brings down the soul from the sky....²⁴

On the same theme, eleventh-century poet Asadi states:

He who is not afraid of woman's cunning
Is a stranger to wisdom and prudence.

Women are able to hide their true nature, Asadi warns:

Women are like trees, green to the eye,
But bearing poisonous fruit in secret.²⁵

Similar negative sentiments are also expressed by characters in the twelfth-century romances of the poet Nizami.²⁶

Although considered cunning, woman is also thought to be deficient in intelligence (*naqis al-'aql*). The hadith *Hunna naqisat al-'aql wa-al-din* (women are deficient in intelligence and religion) is echoed by poet-philosopher Nasir-i Khusraw (b. 1003):

Since women are deficient in intelligence and religion,
Why should men choose women's ways?²⁷

According to Nasir al-Din Tusi (1201-74) in his book of ethics *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, the woman's deficient intelligence inclines her to commit evil. In his chapter "The Chastisement of Wives," Tusi advises men to eschew polygamy because "women are impelled, by the jealousy rooted in their natures, operating together with their *deficiency in intelligence*, to give way to abominations and ignominies, and to such other acts as necessarily bring about the corruption of the household, evil association, a disagreeable existence and a want of order...."²⁸

In the eleventh-century epic the *Shahnamah* of Firdawsi, women are said to be preoccupied with the lower things in life:

Women do not gain a high name,
For they do nothing but eat and sleep.²⁹

In a famous couplet, though one omitted by many editors of the *Shahnamah*, we are told that "Women and dragons are best

when buried," and that it were best if the world were untainted by woman.³⁰ Elsewhere Firdawsi warns that woman's heart is the seat of *div* (devil or demon).³¹

In Fakhr al-Din Gurgani's romance of *Vis and Ramin* (1040-54), the heroine herself disparages women:

Women are created incomplete; thus they are self-obsessed and of ill repute. They lose this world and the next simply for one desire; when desire comes on them they do not seek a good name by virtue of reason....Though women have many wiles, they swallow empty words and speeches from men....³²

In Jami's fifteenth-century allegorical romance *Salaman va Absal*, passion for women is considered base and degrading, for its object is "A thing deficient in reason and faith;/there is nothing so deficient in the whole world."³³ In a long speech in condemnation of woman, a "philosopher" and "benevolent sage" states: "it is far removed from the conduct of perfect men/to be, month and year, the plaything of defective creatures;/in the eyes of the perfect man, a leader by his knowledge,/the defective's plaything is inferior even to the defective."

The sage also condemns woman for being unfaithful, ungrateful, and dishonest:

Though her cheek be a tablet of purity,
that tablet is utterly bare of the word fidelity.
Who ever saw faithfulness in a woman in this world?
Who ever saw anything but craftiness and treachery?
.....
If you are old, she must needs have another lover,
A companion more vigorous than you....

These condemnations are followed by an anecdote about Solomon's wife Bilqays (the Queen of Sheba), who confesses that she desires every young man she sets eyes on. The sage comments:

Such is the state of women of good character;
let us not discuss the woman of evil character:
Master Firdausi, whose wisdom you well know,
uttered scathing maledictions against the good woman;

how should the vicious woman ever become virtuous?
Good men will certainly hold her worthy of malediction.

Like Hippolytus in Euripides' tragedy,³⁴ the sage in Jami's romance bemoans the fact that man must succumb to passion "without which the procreation of children is not known." However, while Hippolytus can only wish that men could acquire sons without woman's collaboration, the sage actually contrives "the birth of a son without the collaboration of women":

He drew from the king's loins without passion a sperm
which he deposited in a certain place--not a womb;
after nine months there issued from that place
an infant without blemish....³⁵

Although created without the taint of passion, the hero, Absal, falls passionately in love. As the opening sections of the romance suggest, however, the work does not celebrate passion but concludes with its rejection.³⁶

As we have seen, woman is disparaged even in the courtly romance, a genre which of necessity must idealize woman--how else is a man to be in love with her?

Only as wife and mother, and especially as the latter, can woman redeem herself; even then, she is little more than a drain on her father's and husband's assets. The author of the *Qabusnamah* (1083) tells his son that "it were best for a girl not to come into existence, but, being born, she had better be married or be buried...but as long as she is in your house, treat your daughter with compassion."³⁷

Destined for marriage and motherhood, the girl is trained to be submissive and docile and to limit her horizon. Some medieval sources advise against teaching females to read and write. "When she grows up," says the *Qabusnamah*, "entrust her to a preceptor so that she shall learn the provisions of the sacred law and the essential religious duties. But do not teach her to read and write; that is a great calamity."³⁸ This notion also occurs in *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, in "The Education of Offspring," a chapter which devotes eleven pages to sons but only the following passage to daughters: "They should be brought up to keep close to the house and live in seclusion, cultivating gravity, con-

tinence, modesty and the other qualities we have enumerated in the chapter on wives. They should be prevented from learning to read or write, but allowed to acquire such accomplishments as are commendable in women. When they reach the bounds of maturity they should be joined to one of equal standing."³⁹

Since marriage and motherhood are the woman's destiny, chastity is the virtue most prized in her. The chaste, obedient woman earns the approval of most writers, except for pessimists like Firdawsi, who maintains that "A dog is far better than a hundred chaste women."⁴⁰

As we have seen, negative remarks about women can occur in any genre of medieval Iranian literature as well as in nonliterary writings. The works of the poet-philosopher Nasir-i Khusraw, the epic poet Firdawsi, the romance writers Nizami and Jami, and the moralist Nasir al-Din Tusi all reflect a low regard for women. Sa'di's work is no exception and his negative view of women is often expressed casually, when he is criticizing a mode of conduct and chooses woman as a negative example to make his point. In the "Second Treatise," where he encourages the reader to transcend this world, he states: "Verily the life of this world is a game and games are for children as adornments and ornaments are the preoccupation of women."⁴¹ Here it is not Sa'di's primary intention to criticize woman, though he selects her as a negative example and places her in the same category as children.

In Sa'di, a cowardly man is likened to a woman, for woman is characterized by timidity. In Tusi's system of ethics timidity in men is a flaw, signifying "lack of self-regard, weakness of nature, faint-heartedness, and...affinity with the characters of women and children."⁴² In the "Gulistan" a prince exhorts his men to fight bravely or else "put on the garments of women." "These words augmented the rage of the troopers so that they...gained the victory...."⁴³

In addition to being thought a coward, woman is judged to be of low moral character. In the "Bustan," a man instructed to murder another refrains from doing so when he discovers that his potential victim is righteous and benevolent. "If but a rose I lay upon your person,/No man am I

before man's eyes--a woman, rather!" he tells the man he was to kill, thus associating woman with villainy and man with moral character.⁴⁴ The same sentiment is also expressed in Sa'di's aphorisms.

A man without compassion (*mard-i bi muruvvat*) is a woman, and an avaricious worshipper is a highwayman. Consulting women shows poor judgment, and generosity to evil doers constitutes a sin.⁴⁵

In literary works, the notion of man's superior moral character is subscribed to even by female characters. "Manliness and generosity (*javanmardi*) belong to men, and if a woman does the manly and generous thing she is a man," says a woman in al-Arjani's *Samak-i 'ayyar* (eleventh to twelfth century).⁴⁶ Similarly, in Nizami's *Khusraw va Shirin*, Khusraw's wife accuses women of deceitfulness and asserts that loyalty (*vafa*) can be found only in men.⁴⁷

Ordinarily, in Sa'di a woman is inferior to any man, unless he happens to be of truly low character, in which case even a dog is better than he is:

A woman is better far than a hurtful man,
A dog than people-afflicting people....⁴⁸

Sa'di's low regard for women leads to their casual disparagement even in the heterosexual love poems, where a member of their sex is idealized. Somewhat insensitively, in one poem Sa'di congratulates himself for his marvelous verses and facetiously calls for the revival of the pre-Islamic practice of the live burial of infant girls:

O Sa'di, your bright heart like mother-of-pearl
Turned every drop it drank into a gem.
Your sweet verses, these daughters of your poetic gift,
Have driven to ecstasy the discerning.
It is fitting, therefore, that those who beget daughters
In your time, should bury them alive.⁴⁹

This insensitivity is revealed also in Sa'di's anecdote about a Chinese slave girl who rejects the advances of a drunken king and who is punished by being delivered to a black slave who has his way with her. The woman's feelings and responses are not dwelled upon in the tale; they are not an issue at all.⁵⁰

Despite his low regard for women, Sa'di shows compassion for widows, old women, and mothers, and expresses admiration for devout women. About the mother he says:

The well-beloved mother's lap and bosom
Are paradise, her breasts a stream of milk therein;
A lofty tree she is, life nourishing,
The child a delicate fruit upon it;
Are not the bosom's veins one with the heart's interior?
Thus, if you consider well, milk is the heart's blood.⁵¹

Three anecdotes in the "Bustan" and one in the "Gulistan" exhort the young to respect the mother.⁵² Sa'di's high regard for mothers is shared by Tusi. A believer in woman's inferiority, Tusi nevertheless grants woman a high position as parent and makes filial obedience a virtue and filial disobedience a vice.⁵³

Sa'di's admiration for saintly women is revealed in the "Second Treatise," where a holy Muslim with many disciples acknowledges the superiority of a devout woman, saying, "I wish I were the dust under the feet of that veiled creature."⁵⁴ Elsewhere Sa'di states:

Women who bear devotion by free choice
Will outstrip men who lack for piety....⁵⁵

Thus, through devotion, women can outstrip men.

Of Wives and Woes

Sa'di's longest statement on wives occurs in a poem in a chapter of the "Bustan" entitled "Concerning the World of Edification."⁵⁶ The poem's opening lines describe the ideal wife as obedient, chaste, sympathetic, friendly, modest, and pleasantly spoken. "To beauty or ugliness have no regard:/A pleasant-mannered wife's more soothing than one fair," says the poet, choosing the ugly wife who has a good disposition over the "pari-countenanced, but ugly dispositioned" wife; for the former "Vinegar, from her husband's hand, she will take like sweetmeats...." Having listed the characteristics of the unsuitable wife, the poet offers these words of advice:

which attaches little importance to love and desire.
According to Tusi:

The motive for taking a wife should be twofold, the preservation of property and the quest of progeny; it should not be at the instigation of appetite or for any other purpose.⁵⁹

"Marry a woman of honorable family in order to have a lady in the house and not to indulge in sexual pleasure," suggests the *Qabusnamah*, for "to satisfy your desires you can buy slave girls in the bazaar, which involves neither so much expense nor so much trouble."⁶⁰

As for the ideal wife, Tusi's description is similar to Sa'di's:

The best of wives is the wife adorned with intelligence, piety, continence, shrewdness, modesty, tenderness, a loving disposition, control of her tongue, obedience to her husband, self-devotion in his service and a preference for his pleasure....⁶¹

Tusi believes that the husband's sovereignty over his wife is to be maintained at all cost. For example, if "afflicted with the trial of love for her, he should keep it concealed from her and so contrive that she never becomes aware thereof. Then, if he cannot contain himself, he must employ the remedies prescribed in the case of Love."⁶² The husband must rule his wife; otherwise, "the one who should command is commanded, the one who should obey is obeyed, and the regulator is regulated; and the end of such a state is the realization of shame and disgrace...."⁶³

To ensure her chastity, the husband "should restrain the wife from foolish pastimes, from looking at strangers, and from listening to tales about men....women should be prevented from learning the Joseph sura, inasmuch as listening to such narratives may cause them to deviate from the law of continence."⁶⁴ Other writers especially warn against exposing wives to *Vis va Ramin*, which tells of Vis's adulterous love. The *Qabusnamah* suggests that to keep wives from temptation the husband should allow no man to enter the women's quarters, except for old, ugly black eunuchs.⁶⁵

The segregation of men and women, the woman's lack of education, the belief in her moral and intellectual deficiency, and the premium placed on the husband's sovereignty in marriage contributed to the incompatibility of men and women in medieval Iran. The differences in their education and upbringing must have prevented men and women from being friends and companions and must have encouraged close bonds between men. Sexual segregation, the veil, and the close bond between men must have contributed to male homosexuality. In Sa'di's works men generally choose boys for love and other men for friendship and companionship. Romantic love between men and women is strikingly absent among the anecdotes of the "Gulistan" and "Bustan." The few stories on marriage speak of marital discord. Sa'di himself complains of his wife, who "turned out to be ill-humoured, quarrelsome, disobedient, abusive in her tongue and embittering my life"⁶⁶ Ironically, the only anecdote of marital love in the chapter "On Love and Youth" in the "Gulistan" turns out to be a mother-in-law joke! "The beautiful wife of a man died but her mother, a decrepit old hag, remained in the house on account of the dowry." Asked "how he bore the loss of his beloved," the husband replies, "It is not as painful not to see my wife as to see the mother of my wife."⁶⁷

In the "Gulistan" and "Bustan" most husbands view wives and children merely as a burden. Once the "active, graceful, smiling, sweet-tongued youth" gives hostage to fortune, "the root of [his] merriment [is]...cut and the roses of his countenance [wither]."⁶⁸

As for marital differences, in several anecdotes Sa'di seems pessimistic about their resolution. The abused spouse seeking advice from an elder is generally told "Your heart...on hardship set,/For none at such fortitude should be ashamed."⁶⁹

Whatever their faults, however, Sa'di's women are chaste. Incidence of the wife's adultery is quite rare. One brief anecdote on the subject, unaccountably placed in a chapter of the "Gulistan" entitled "On the Advantages of Silence," tells of an astrologer who, having entered his house discovers a stranger with his wife. "How knowest thou what is in the Zenith of the sky/If thou art not aware who is in thy house?"⁷⁰ comments a pious man upon learning of the incident.

Like Chaucer's old knight, January, several old men in Sa'di believe that "to take a wyf is a glorious thing," especially "whan a man is oold and hoor./ Thanne is a wyf the fruyt of his tresor."⁷¹ Such marriages work out as badly in Sa'di as they do in Chaucer. The sanction of polygamy made January-May marriages much more common in Sa'di's Iran than in Chaucer's monogamous England. Yet, Sa'di discourages such unions, warning that the husband's failure to satisfy his wife creates discord. In one anecdote, where the husband's age prevents him from consummating the marriage Sa'di sides with the young bride.⁷²

A woman who arises without satisfaction from a man,
Will raise many a quarrel and contention.
An old man who is unable to rise from his place,
Except by the aid of a stick, how can his own stick
rise?⁷³

Compared to Christianity and Judaism, divorces are easy to get in Islam. According to Tusi, a speedy divorce is the best solution to marital discord, "for the proximity of a bad wife is worse than that of wild beasts and serpents."⁷⁴ (Such must have been the advice Sa'di followed with regard to his shrewish wife.) Occasionally, however, the bride-price (*mahr*) the husband owed his wife stood in the way of his freedom. In an anecdote in the "Hazliyyat," a young man marries without having seen his bride's face. Finding her very ugly, he refuses to consummate the marriage and, unable to pay the *mahr*, pleads with his father-in-law to release him from that obligation. Being refused, the desperate groom takes revenge by seducing his wife's sister, brother, mother, nurse, and servant. Upon learning of these goings on, to prevent further evil, the father-in-law is only too happy to set the groom free.⁷⁵ It is possible that this anecdote is meant as a criticism of the custom which forbade the bride and groom to see each other until after the wedding ceremony. The episode's value as social criticism is, however, obscured by its deliberate coarseness and its extremely obscene language.

From Women to Boys

The deterioration of the Iranian woman's social status in Islamic Iran and the moral laxity encouraged by the open pederasty of the Turkish Ghaznavid, Seljuq, and Khwarazmshahian rulers promoted the love of boys in Iran, so that in much of medieval Iranian love lyrics women were supplanted by boys:

In the higher ranks of society women, whether wives or slaves, waited in the...women's quarters on their master's pleasure....[H]owever ready they might be to seek diversion elsewhere they could not hope to evade the close surveillance of the eunuchs. Their master had, therefore, no need to win their good graces or even to make himself agreeable to them. And as for women belonging to any other social class, whether artistes [i.e., singers and dancing girls] or courtesans, it was only necessary to pay them. Thus, deprived as they were of any freedom of action, women ceased to be the main object of amorous desire. Romantic passion was now inspired by those adolescent youths whose beauty and charm enlivened the male social gatherings.⁷⁶

Unsurprisingly, most Iranian medieval romances are about pre-Islamic legendary lovers and pre-Islamic times, when women enjoyed greater freedom and prestige.

As for the origin of homosexuality in Iran, the severe condemnation of it in the Avesta shows that it existed in ancient Iran and was not introduced with Hellenism, as Herodotus would have us believe.⁷⁷ In his essay on the "Sotadic Zone," Richard F. Burton claims that pederasty is "geographical and climatic not racial." He includes Iran in the geographic area where pederasty "is popular and endemic, held at the worst to be a mere peccadillo...."⁷⁸ Whatever the Iranian man's inclination toward boys, the veil and the Islamic restrictions placed on social intercourse between the sexes must have contributed to pederasty. Furthermore, the open pederasty of the Turkish rulers⁷⁹ who dominated Iran in the eleventh and twelfth century must have encouraged the love of boys and made it tolerable if not acceptable. The homosexual love of Sultan Mahmud for his slave Ayaz and that of Mahmud's son Mas'ud for Nushtagin are alluded to

frequently in the writings of the period without condemnation. Among the gifts these Turkish rulers showered on their court poets were beautiful slave girls and slave boys, the latter trained to serve as catamites. Affluent men bought slave boys while the less fortunate made do with less charming male prostitutes found in the seedy parts of town. Sa'di's works suggest that pederasty was common and generally tolerated.

As mentioned earlier, in most love poems of Sa'di the beloved's gender is not specified, though in some the loved one is addressed as *pisar*, *ghulam*, *kudak*, and *shahid*, terms which identify the love object as a boy or youth. Line four of a *ghazal* in the "Tayyibat" identifies the beloved as a boy more dazzling than the sun and lovelier than any flower, his erect figure dwarfing the cypress.⁸⁰ In the opening line of another love poem in the "Badayi'" Sa'di calls the beloved a "heart-robbing boy" and depicts himself as a captive in love, a prisoner of the boy's beauty. The loved-one is ruthless, but neither sword nor arrow disheartens his host of admirers who will gladly give up life itself in his quest.⁸¹ In Sa'di the love of boys is crude and lustful in the pornographic works, passionate and romantic in the secular lyric poems, and Platonic in the mystical love lyrics. Thus, Sa'di's works present the many facets of the love of boys in life and literature.

The mystical dimension of the love of boys is suggested by the many benefits associated with the contemplation of the beautiful face (*ruy-i niku*). The *Nawruznamah* (The Book of the New Year's Day), by 'Umar Khayyam (d. 1123), lists these benefits and sums up the accepted views on the subject. The chapter entitled "Discourse on the Merits of the Beautiful Face" lists four benefits derived from the contemplation of the beautiful face:

First, it makes the day auspicious; second, it adds pleasure to life; third, it inspires generosity and compassion; fourth, it augments [one's] wealth and position....⁸²

The anecdotes illustrating these points are about beautiful females as well as males, but the one most emphasized is about Sultan Mahmud and a beautiful boy whom the sultan wanted constantly before him. "And through the auspicious-

ness of his face, Mahmud achieved great deeds and victories, and conquered many provinces in India and many cities in Khurasan and became king."⁸³

These ideas are reflected in Sa'di's remarks about the *shahid*, or beautiful boy, "with whom the souls of pious men are inclined to commingle because it has been said that a little beauty is better than much wealth. An attractive face is said to be a salve to despondent hearts and the key to locked doors, wherefore the society of such a person is everywhere known to be very acceptable."⁸⁴

The four worldly benefits derived from the contemplation of the beautiful face are dwarfed by the transcendental benefits of the same exercise, believed to lead to the appreciation of a higher truth: "Some say that the beautiful face is the sign (*ayat*) of God, which offers the truth to the inquirers of truth, so that through it they may return to God."⁸⁵ This notion, the general basis in Platonism, Pantheism, metempsychosis, and Sufism, is the belief that the contemplation of beauty in its physical form can lead to the appreciation of beauty in the abstract and ultimately to union with the Divine Being. As Khayyam states:

Some call [the beautiful face] the domain of love; others, the field of happiness, the garden of affection, the ornament of creation, and the sign of paradise. Philosophers consider it the reason for God's creation and for our quest to learn about God. [The beautiful face] guides us to apprehend the Creator's goodness. According to Pantheists (*Tabi'iyān*)...it represents balance...while metempsychosists consider it to be God's reward to his creature for purity and virtuousness in [previous life times]....And some say that the beautiful face is the sign of God, which offers the truth to seekers of truth, so that through it they may return to God.⁸⁶

In sufism, love for the beautiful youth (*shahid*) aids the Sufi to purge his love from all sensual elements and to achieve union with God through the extinction of the self. Such notions lent legitimacy to the love of boys, though there were skeptics who dismissed these ideas as an excuse for pederasty. In the words of Sa'di in the "Bustan":

A certain class are wont to sit with pleasant boys,
Claiming to be pure-dealers, men of insight;
Take it from me, worn out by many days:
The fasting man at tables eats regrets:
The sheep eats date-stones, but only because
Locks and bonds lie on the date-bales....⁸⁷

*The Love Chapters in the "Gulistan"
and "Bustan"*

Chapter Five of the "Gulistan," entitled "On Love and Youth," and Chapter Three of the "Bustan," called "On Love, Intoxication, and Delirium," provide examples of homosexual, heterosexual, and mystical love. On the whole the "Gulistan" chapter is worldly and homosexual while the "Bustan" chapter is mystical and spiritual, revealing a maturer, more serious Sa'di.

Of the 21 anecdotes in the "Gulistan" chapter on love, two (nos. 15, 19) are heterosexual, and two (nos. 12, 16) can be heterosexual or homosexual.⁸⁸ Another three (nos. 6, 8, 14) treat of friendship, perhaps with some homosexual overtones in numbers 6 and 8. One (no. 4) is homosexual and mystical, and twelve (nos. 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 17, 18, 20, 21) are homosexual. Number 13, about compatibility, is applicable to love as well as friendship between men.

Heterosexual love does not figure prominently in the chapter "On Love and Youth." The two heterosexual anecdotes are brief: number 15 is about the legendary lover Majnun; and number 19, already mentioned, is about a widower more distressed about the presence of his mother-in-law than saddened by the loss of his wife. Of the two anecdotes that can be homosexual or heterosexual number 12 is about wagging tongues, and number 16 on Sa'di's encounter with a beauty of unidentified sex on a summer's day. Numbers 6, 8, and 14 appear to be autobiographical, dealing with intimate friendship between men. Number 4 illustrates the Sufi notion that the love of a beautiful youth can lead to mystical union with God. The lover is a poor man, the beloved a prince. When the prince finally learns of the lover's secret and goes to see him, the lover is so moved that "he uttered a shout and surrendered his life."⁸⁹ Of the twelve homosexual anecdotes number 1 is about Sultan

Mahmud and Ayaz and number 2 on the homosexual desire of a teacher for a male student. In numbers 3 and 9 the lovers are an ascetic and a learned man respectively, in love with youths. In number 11, Sa'di disparages the catamite:

When the beardless youth [*amrad*] is beautiful and sweet
His speech is bitter, his temper hasty.
When his beard grows and he attains puberty
He associates with men and seeks affection.⁹⁰

Number 20, one of the longer episodes of the "Gulistan," is about the love of a judge for a farrier boy,⁹¹ and number 21 deals with the unselfish devotion of two youths to each other.

The three remaining homosexual anecdotes (nos. 10, 17, 18) are perhaps autobiographic. In number 10 Sa'di speaks of "closest terms of intimacy" between himself and a youth "who had a melodious voice and a form beautiful like the moon just rising."⁹² In number 17, the poet recalls a flirtation with "a graceful boy," a student in the main mosque of Kashghar. In number 18, Sa'di recalls his despair at the loss of a youth whose "beauty was the Qiblah of my eye and the chief joy of my life union with him." When the youth dies, Sa'di "resolved and firmly determined to fold up the carpet of pleasure during the rest of my life and to retire from mixing in society."⁹³

Love in the third chapter of the "Bustan" is predominantly mystical. Much profounder than the chapter it parallels in the "Gulistan," "On Love, Intoxication, and Delirium" includes a prologue and twenty anecdotes. Of the three heterosexual anecdotes, number 49 and 52 are on marital discord, and number 53 on the legendary lover Majnun.⁹⁴ Only in one anecdote (no. 50), about the love aroused in his patients by a handsome physician, is love merely homosexual with no mystical overtones. Numbers 56 and 58 are not relevant to the chapter's theme, and numbers 47, 48, and 57 are not mystical and offer an orthodox treatment of the love of God. Of the rest, in numbers 45, 51, 55, 60, 61, and 62, love is purely mystical, perceived without the intermediariship of a beautiful youth (*shahid*). Possessing very slight narrative element, these anecdotes describe the various stages of the mystical experience. Numbers 43, 44, 46, 54, and 59, on the other hand, illustrate the manner in which the love of a youth can guide the lover to transcend

World of Edification" Sa'di launches a bitter attack against the haughty, ungrateful youth, warning that "the house-uprooting...[*shahid*] will make a desolation for you":

Though you may kiss his feet, he'll give you no regard:
Though you be dust before him, no gratitude he will show you.
Empty your head of brains, of coins your hands,
If you would set your mind on other people's children:
On other people's children look not to evil purpose,
Lest your own child thereby comes to corruption.¹⁰⁰

In the love poems Sa'di welcomes the *Shahid*'s cruelty and offers to sacrifice life and fortune to please the boy, but in the above-mentioned chapter of the "Bustan" he criticizes the arrogant youth and advises the lover to "Go, cause your house to flourish with a wife."¹⁰¹ The arrogance of the *shahid* is also criticized in the "Gulistan."¹⁰²

The Persian language reflects the same ambivalence toward the love of boys. The *Lughatnamah* (Encyclopedic Dictionary) defines *shahid* as (1) a man who has a beautiful face, a youth, a youth whose beard has just sprouted, and (2) the beloved, a beautiful woman or youth.¹⁰³ Both in its literal and figurative sense the term's connotations are positive and tend to emphasize the physical beauty of the youth, not his role in the homosexual act. Social disapproval of pederasty is reflected in derogatory terms like *amrad* and *mukhannas* (catamite).¹⁰⁴ *Amrad* (beardless) also means effeminate and passive (*maf'ul*, the done). The term's other definitions (stupid, crafty, cowardly, spiritless, ignoble, infamous, disgraced) also suggest social disapproval of the catamite. The catamite is the object of much more severe disapproval than the sodomite (*fa'il*, the doer). Iranian medieval writings reveal a strong stigma against the passive homosexual. The boy one loved passionately was the *shahid*, but the boy one sodomized was the *mukhannas* or *amrad*. Sa'di used terms such as boy, youth, and *shahid* in his lyric poetry, and *amrad* and *mukhannas* in the "Hazliyyat" and the more down-to-earth portions of the "Gulistan." This contempt for the passive homosexual is perhaps due in part to the similarity in the sexual act between his function and that of the woman. To the catamite men transfer their low regard for woman.

The pornographic writings of Sa'di abound with derogatory remarks about the *mukhannas*, and even the "Gulistan" includes several invectives against him. In one anecdote Sa'di states that to describe the *mukhannas* "would be an abandonment of good manners, especially in the presence of great men." He casually suggests that "If a Tartar slays [the *mukhannas*]/The Tartar must not be slain in return./How long will he be like the bridge of Baghdad/With water flowing beneath and men on the back?" complains the poet, having crossed that bridge many a time himself.¹⁰⁵

Although found less objectionable than the catamite, the active homosexual was not free from blame, as obscene terms or curse words such as *kunparast*, *amradbaz*, *ghulam-barah* (sodomite or pederast) suggest.

Both Zoroastrianism and Islam condemned homosexuality. The Avesta forbade homosexual acts and a commentary of it authorized any passerby to kill the homosexual caught in the act.¹⁰⁷ More lenient than the Avesta, the Quran also prohibits lesbian and homosexual acts and appoints punishment for the guilty.¹⁰⁸ In the story of Lot, the Quran condemns sodomy in the strongest terms.¹⁰⁹

In *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, moralist Nasir al-Din Tusi counts the "appetite for pederasty" as a symptom of "the depravity of the faculty [of attraction]," one of the soul's three faculties.¹¹⁰ To suppress effeminacy in boys, Tusi recommends a spartan upbringing and prohibits anything that might encourage effeminate conduct. "His hair should not be arranged, nor should he be decked in the garments of women. Let him be given no ring until the time of necessity arrives." Tusi also advises against effeminacy in movement and gesture: "One should not...move the shoulders in the manner of women and effeminate men. The dangling and movements of the hands are also to be guarded against...."¹¹¹ Further to guard the boy's purity, Tusi advises parents to forbid him to read poetry about love or wine or to be present in the gathering of wine drinkers.¹¹² Tusi's concerns show that in thirteenth-century Iranian society the prevalence of pederasty caused parental anxiety. The works of Sa'di offer several examples of such concern. In the "Bustan," the father of a handsome boy shaves his son's head to discourage his admirers. In the chapter "On the World of Edification," which includes most of Sa'di's criticism of

pederasty, a handsome boy rejects Sa'di's invitation to a gathering of revellers. "Having no whiskers...like men,/ To sit before men thus--it were not manly," says the boy. And Sa'di approvingly adds:

Ask for none with blacker record than that catamite
Whose face grows black before he has a downy cheek:
From such a one, thus lacking in respect of self, a
man should flee,
For his unmanliness will shed men's honour.
Where there's a son who sits among the Qalandars,
Tell the father he may wash his hands of any good
for him....¹¹³

As we have seen, Sa'di both idealizes and condemns sex between men and boys. The *Qabusnamah*, in which the author advises his son on the conduct of his life, reveals a wholesale acceptance of sexual relations with boys. The opening chapters "On Knowing God" and "Concerning the Creation of the Apostles and Their Mission" show the writer to be a religious Muslim. Yet apparently he sees no conflict between his devotion to God and his acceptance of pederasty. A number of chapters in the *Qabusnamah* show the prevalence of pederasty and its complete acceptance, at least in the author's circle of rulers and princes. The chapter "On the Purchase of Slaves" describes, among other groups, the "soft-fleshed and fine-skinned" slave boys suitable to be catamites. "The slave that you buy for your private service and conviviality (*khalvat va mu'asharat*)" should be "soft-fleshed, fine-skinned, with regular bones, a ruddy (face), black hair and black eyebrows...a small waist, large hips, and a round chin, with white and regular teeth. A slave boy who is as I have described is beautiful and companionable, even-tempered, loyal, and delicate-natured and agreeable."¹¹⁴ Apparently a connoisseur himself, the author recommends Turkish slave boys who "for pleasure and feasting are surpassed by no other kind." Among the Turks, the Khutanis, the Khullakhis, and the Tibetans are especially noted for being most pleasant and most compliant in conviviality (*bi'ishrat farmanbardartar*).¹¹⁵

Akhlaq-i Nasiri condemns the appetite for boys as a sign of the depravity of the faculty of attraction; the *Qabusnamah*, on the other hand, accepts sex with boys as natural, never finding it necessary to justify or explain

this position. In the chapter "On Romantic Passion" the author assumes that the object of his son's love can be male or female. He advises his son against romantic love not on moral grounds, but because "a lover's life is beset with unhappiness...." Early in the chapter the author indicates that the object of romantic love can be male or female (*ma'shuq*, or *ma'shuqah*). Although in some parts of the chapter it is not clear whether the passion discussed is homosexual or heterosexual, there are places which distinctly speak of a man in love with a youth:

If...there is someone of whom you are passionately fond, let it be a person worthy of love; although the object of one's affection cannot always be a Ptolemy or Plato, he should have some endowment of good sense. Although I know, too, that not everyone can be Joseph son of Jacob, yet there must be in him some pleasing quality which shall prevent men from cavilling and allow indulgence to be readily accorded to you....¹¹⁶

Elsewhere, the author advises his son that if he takes his male friend to a party, he should not appear preoccupied with him. Apparently, in the author's circle a man was allowed to take his favorite youth to a party, but public display of affection was a breach of decorum.¹¹⁷

In "On Taking One's Pleasure," which follows the chapter on romantic love, the author directs his son in the regulation of his sex life:

As between women and youths, do not confine your inclinations to either sex; thus you may find enjoyment from both kinds without either of the two becoming inimical to you.¹¹⁸

In this chapter the regulation of one's sexual appetite is guided in part by current opinions about health. Just as "excessive copulation is harmful, [complete] abstinence also has its dangers." In the spring, when "the blood in the veins increases together with semen in the loins...the need for intercourse and relief becomes urgent in every man...." This relief can be attained through intercourse with boys or women, although, again for health reasons, the author advises his son to "let [his] desire

incline towards youths [during the summer] and during the winter towards women."¹¹⁹ The love of boys in the *Qabus-namah* is devoid of any Platonic or mystical significance. For the author, bisexuality seems to be the norm, any man being equally inclined toward women and boys.

A similar attitude is shown in a tale in Sa'di's "Gulistan." A king invites an ascetic to stay in his palace and, among other means of comfort, sends him a slave boy and a slave girl. The ascetic finds the two beauties equally desirable and apparently enjoys them both. The fact that the king includes a slave of each sex and the casual tone with which Sa'di tells the story indicate that bisexuality was common.¹²⁰

While Iranian medieval texts attest to the prevalence of homosexuality they avoid lesbianism.¹²¹ This writer does not recall a single lesbian episode in medieval Iranian writings, literary or otherwise. The absence of lesbianism in literature, however, is not proof of its absence in life. Sexual segregation encourages lesbianism among girls and unmarried women. Similarly, polygamy encourages lesbianism in the harem, where several wives are forced to share one husband. Lesbianism is perhaps also encouraged in a society where many men show a predilection for boys.

We do not know whether Iranians tolerated lesbianism as they did pederasty. Whether coy or indifferent, male poets and writers kept silent about lesbian practices. There is no instance of lesbianism in Sa'di, not even in the pornographic writings. Yet, the European traveler Sir John Chardin, who visited Iran in the seventeenth century, claims that the "lesbian vice" flourished in the harems of the East:

The women of the East...have ever been said to be given to the Lesbian vice. I have heard it said so often, and by so many people, that this is so, and that they have means of mutually contending their passions, that I hold it for very certain. They are prevented, so far as may be, from these practices, for it is said that they diminish their charms and render them less receptive to the passion of men....¹²²

The prevalence of lesbianism in the harem is confirmed also by Richard Burton, who traveled in the Middle East and North Africa in the second half of the nineteenth century:

Wealthy harems...are hot-beds of Sapphism and tribadism. Every woman past her first youth has a girl whom she calls her "Myrtle" (in Damascus). At Agbome, capital of Dahome, I found that a troop of women was kept for the use of the "Amazons" (Mission to Gelele, ii, 73). Amongst the wild Arabs, who ignore Socratic and Sapphic perversions, the lover is always more jealous of his beloved's girl-friends than of men rivals.¹²³

The *Arabian Nights* tale that elicits Burton's comment is about a lover who suspects his sweetheart of the lesbian vice when he finds the maid kissing her.¹²⁴

It stands to reason that in a sexually segregated society, where unmarried men and women had little opportunity to meet, some women would be driven to lesbianism. From a practical point, it was much safer and simpler to have a lesbian relation than to risk meeting a man. Not unlike the modern women's prison, the harem could encourage lesbianism among women deprived of male company.

Perhaps Islamic Iran is silent about lesbianism because it did not have a Sappho to celebrate lesbian love. As for male writers, most seem unwilling to speak of woman's unchastity and perhaps this accounts for the absence of lesbians and the dearth of adulterous women in the romantic literature of medieval Iran. The generally chaste women in Iranian courtly romances sharply contrast the bevy of adulterous royal wives in the courtly literature of medieval Europe inspired by *amour courtois* or courtly love.¹²⁵ In Nizami's *Khusraw va Shirin*, for example, though passionately in love, the heroine resists her beloved's advances until he consents to marry her. As for the adulterous heroine of the eleventh-century *Vis va Ramin*¹²⁶ and the unfaithful wives of the *Tutinamah*,¹²⁷ one should remember that the former was a pre-Islamic romance retold and the latter a collection of tales based on an Indian original. Whatever the status of the Iranian woman's virtue in life, in literature she is generally chaste and innocent of extramarital or lesbian sex. Male writers, among them Sa'di,

shied away from mentioning lesbianism; and women writers, who until the 1960s merely imitated literary trends set by men, did not break the tradition.

In his introduction to his book of Persian erotica Robert Surieu states:

The vicissitudes of their existence built up in the people of Iran a deep insight into the relativity of things, so that they not only yearned for the ineffable satisfactions of the life beyond but were eager to enjoy to the full the delights offered by the passing moment.¹²⁸

This remark is certainly true of Sa'di, whose mystical poems express a yearning for the beyond, and whose secular works reveal a desire for the joys of the moment. It is regrettable that this worldly-wise man of experience tells us so little about the women of his time.

NOTES

1. *Kulliyat-i Sa'di*, ed. Muhammad 'Ali Furughi (Tehran: Javidan, n.d.).
2. All references to "Khubsiiyyat va majalis al-hazl" are to an early edition of the *Kulliyat* at the Butler Library of Columbia University (call number 892.8 Sal, I 33), pp. 340-56. "Khabisat" (pl. of *Khabisah*, meaning an evil and impure thing), and "Khubsiiyyat" (from *khubs*, meaning adultery, pederasty, unlawful sex) appear as variants in the title, the first in English and the second in Persian scholarship.
3. Stylistically the "Hazliyyat" is not unlike Sa'di's down-to-earth writings in the "Gulistan." Furthermore, it exists in early manuscripts, for example in a *Kulliyat* made 35 years after Sa'di's death. There is therefore no reason to think the "Hazliyyat" spurious. See Ahmad Javid, "Yik nuskhah-yi kuhan as Kulliyat-i Sa'di," *Maqalati darbarah-yi zindigi va shi'r-i Sa'di*, ed. Mansur Rastigarnizhad, Shawra-yi Intisharat-i Danishgah-i Pahlavi, no. 47 (Shiraz, 1350/1962), p. 48.

4. Cited by J. Rypka, "Poets and Prose Writers of the Late Saljuq and Mongol Periods," *The Cambridge History of Iran* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), V, 600.
5. On Sa'di's travels and long life see Rahimzadah Safavi, *Sarguzasht-i sih akhtar-i tabnak-i Iran: Sa'di, Hafiz, Ibn-i Sina* (Tehran: 'Ilmi, 1335/1957), pp. 17-20, 10-12; and Abbas Iqbal, "Zaman-i tavallud va ava'il-i zindigi-yi Sa'di," *Maktab-i Sa'di*, ed. Kishavarz Sadr (Tehran: Kavyan, 1338/1960), pp. 52-71.
6. On Sa'di's teachers see Furughi's introduction to the *Kulliyat*, p. v. Sa'di mentions Ibn Jawzi in the "Gulistan," *Kulliyat*, pp. 117-18; trans. Edward Rehatsek, *The Gulistan or Rose Garden of Sa'di* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964), pp. 125-27. At their best, English translations of Sa'di cited in this paper convey only his meaning and conceal his art. On the translation of the "Gulistan" into foreign languages see Iraj Afshar, "Bahsi muqaddamati darbab-i tarh-i kitab-shinasi-yi Sa'di va Hafiz," *Maqalati darbarah-yi Zindigi va shi'r-i Sa'di*, p. 12.
7. See the *Kulliyat*, pp. 61, 86, 92, 112, 113, 123, 138, 139, 140, 141, 167, 188, 333, 378, 395, 396. Furughi doubts that Sa'di traveled to so many places (*Kulliyat*, p. iv). Edward G. Browne, however, credits Sa'di with visits to "Balkh, Ghazna, the Panjab, Somnath, Gujerat, Yemen, the Hijaz and other parts of Arabia, Abyssinia, Syria, especially Damascus, and Baalbekk...North Africa, and Asia Minor." See *A Literary History of Persia* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1956), II, 529.
8. On the credibility of the Somnath episode see Qazi Ahmad Mian Akhtar, "Sa'di's Visit to Somnath," *Studies: Islamic and Oriental* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1945), pp. 21-36. According to Th. Emil Homerin this episode "may be seen as a piece of creative fiction following *maqamah* canons." See his "Sa'di's Somnatiyah," *Iranian Studies*, XVI, Nos. 1-2 (Winter-Spring, 1983), pp. 31-50.
9. 'Ali Dashti, *Qalamruv-i Sa'di* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 2536/1977), pp. 186-87, 236-37.

10. "Gulistan," *Kulliyat*, p. 87, trans. Rehatsek, p. 85.
11. For instances of prejudice against blacks see the "Gulistan," *Kulliyat*, pp. 106-7, trans. Rehatsek, pp. 111-12; and the "Bustan," *Kulliyat*, pp. 354-55, trans. G. M. Wickens, *Morals Pointed and Tales Adorned* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), ll. 3037-60. See also Minoo S. Southgate, "Negative Images of Blacks in Some Medieval Iranian Writings," *Iranian Studies*, XVIII, No. 1 (Winter 1984), pp. 13, 17, 24-25. For prejudice against Jews see the "Gulistan," *Kulliyat*, pp. 141, 144, 155; trans. Rehatsek, pp. 159, 164, 178.
12. *Cambridge History of Iran*, V, 600.
13. 'Ali Dashti, p. 232. See also Muhammad Ja'far Mahjub, "Guftugu'i kutah darbarah-yi zaban-i Sa'di va payvand-i an ba zindigi," *Maqalati darbarah-yi zindigi va shi'r-i Sa'di*, pp. 344-45.
14. R. Safavi, *Sarguzasht-i sih akhtar...*, p. 16.
15. On bowdlerized English translations of the "Gulistan" see W. G. Archer's "Preface" to Rehatsek's translation, pp. 15-28. See also the *Arabian Nights*, trans. Richard F. Burton (Privately Printed for the Burton Club, n.d.), V, 156, n. 2.
16. Robert Surieu, *Sarve Naz*, trans. James Hogarth (Geneva: Nagel Publishers, 1967), p. 7.
17. *Kulliyat*, p. 620.
18. Robert Surieu, p. 133.
19. An anecdote in the "Bustan," *Kulliyat*, pp. 354-55, trans. Wickens, ll. 3037-60, tells of the sexual passion of a white woman for a black man, stressing the inappropriateness of such passion and the moral, "Let embracing lovers alone!"
20. "Hazliyyat," pp. 344, 345, and 348. Satirist 'Ubayd Zakani (d. 1379) also preferred boys to women and sodomy to intercourse. See his "Hundred Precepts,"

Kulliyat-i 'Ubayd Zakani, ed. Iqbal Ashtiyani (Tehran: Sharq, 1332/1959), pp. 43-48, and an autobiographic poem, "Masnaviyyat," p. 51. According to Richard Burton (*Arabian Nights*, X, 204), marital pederasty was a problem in Iran as late as the thirteenth century: "We can hardly wonder at the loose conduct of Persian women perpetually mortified by marital pederasty." See also "The Man's Dispute with the Learned Woman Concerning the Relative Excellence of Male and Female," in the 419th Night, *Arabian Nights*, V, 154-63.

In her study of Sohar, in Oman, anthropologist Unni Wikan discusses the *xanith* (homosexual male prostitute) as a person regarded by Soharis "as neither man nor woman...but having a truly distinct, third gender role." The *xanith* primarily serves heterosexual single men. Wikan hypothesizes that the Soharis condone male homosexual prostitution because they consider it a lesser evil than female prostitution:

...It would be difficult to maintain a conception of women as simultaneously pure and sexually active, if some among them were publicly acknowledged also to serve as prostitutes. If the public view, however, is that prostitution is an act of *xaniths*, whereas women are not associated with the moral decay that prostitution represents, then women may be conceptualized as pure and virtuous in their sexual role.

See *Behind the Veil in Arabia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1982), pp. 168, 178.

21. See 'Ali Akbar Dihkhuda, *Amsal va hikam* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1339/1960), s.v. *zanan*, *mard*, *al-nisa'*, and *haba'il al-shaytan*; and Thomas Patrick Hughes, *A Dictionary of Islam* (Clifton, N.J.: Reference Book Publishers, 1965), s.v. *wives and women*.
22. The Quran, iv, 34, quoted in Charis Waddy, *Woman in Muslim History* (London: Longman, 1980), p. 30.
23. Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, ed. and trans., *The Holy Quran: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: The Islamic Center, 1978), xii, 28.

24. Dihkhuda, *Amsal va hikam*, p. 279.
25. Quoted by Jalal Khaliqi Mutlaq, "Gardishi dar Garshasp-namah," *Iran namah*, Vol. II, No. 1 (Autumn 1983), p. 122. See pp. 120-27 for a collection of Asadi's "negative and harsh" statements about women.
26. *Khusraw va Shirin*, ed. Vahid Dastgirdi (Tehran: Ibn-i Sina, 1333/1954), pp. 197, 346. See also *Laila va Majnun*, ed. Vahid Dastgirdi (Tehran: Ibn-i Sina, 1333/1954, p. 144; trans. James Atkinson, *Laila and Majnun* (London: Valpy, 1836), ll. 1447-62.
27. Dihkhuda, *Amsal va hikam*, p. 919.
28. Ed. Mujtaba Minuvi and 'Aliriza Haydari (Tehran: Khwarazmi, 1356/1978), pp. 216, 218; trans. G. M. Wickens, *The Nasirean Ethics* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964), pp. 162, 163. Emphasis added. See also 'Imad ibn Muhammad al-Na'ri, *Tutinamah: jawahir al-asmar, Intisharat-i Farhang-i Iran* (Tehran: 1352/1974), p. 26.
29. Dihkhuda, *Amsal va hikam*, p. 919.
30. *Shahnamah* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1341/1953), p. 123. This line does not appear in the *Shahnamah-yi Firdawsi*, ed. E. Bertels (Moscow, 1962), III, p. 34, l. 438.
31. The *Shahnamah*, ed. Bertels, I, p. 160, gives this line in the footnotes rather than the text. In the Amir Kabir edition the line occurs in the text, p. 52. Some male characters in the *Shahnamah* express similar views on women. It is better for a great man to be dead than to be influenced by a woman, says Rustam, blessing only the woman not yet born of a mother! Women are strangers to wisdom, says Siyavush. See the *Shahnamah-yi Firdawsi*, ed. Bertels, III, p. 171, ll. 2618-19 and p. 15, l. 165.
32. *Vis va Ramin*, ed. Muhammad Ja'far Mahjub (Tehran: Ibn-i Sina, 1337/1959), pp. 97-98; trans. George Morrison, *Vis and Ramin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), p. 90.

33. (Tehran: Sharq, 1928). All quotations are from pages 54-57; translated in A. J. Arberry, *Fitzgerald's Salaman and Absal* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1956), pp. 160-61.
34. "Hippolytus," in *Euripides I*, trans. Richmond Lattimore et al. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1955), 11. 619-24. On the same theme, Firdawsi suggests that having acquired a proper child, a man should forswear the love of woman. See *The Shahnamah-yi Firdawsi*, ed. Bertels, III, p. 39, l. 567.
35. In his view that the child is created from man's sperm alone, Jami agrees with Aristotle. See Edgar Gregersen, *Sexual Practices* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1983), p. 34. Apparently Jami was ignorant of Al-Ghazali's opinion in *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (Revivification of Religious Sciences) that "The child is not created from the man's sperm alone, but from the union of a sperm from the male with a sperm from the female...and in any case the sperm from the female is a determinant factor in the process of coagulation." Translated in Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1975), p. 8.
36. On Islam's "fear [of] the power of female sexual attraction over men" see Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, pp. 1-28. Mernissi's analysis of Imam al-Ghazali's views on sexuality is especially noteworthy. For al-Ghazali's opinion see his *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (Qairo: al-Halabi, 1967), II, 27-53; III, 126-35.
37. Amir 'Unsur al-Ma'ali Kaykavus ibn Iskandar, *Qabusnamah*, ed. Sa'id Nafisi (Tehran: Furughi, 1342/1964), p. 98; trans. Reuben Levy, *A Mirror for Princes: The Qabus Nama* (London: Cresset, 1951), p. 125. For aphorisms and proverbs on women and marriage see Dihkhuda, *Amsal va hikam*, pp. 920-21.
38. *Qabusnamah*, p. 98; trans. Levy, p. 125.
39. *Akhlag-i Nasiri*, pp. 229-30; trans. Wickens, p. 173. Thirteenth-century poet Awhadi warns that teaching women to read and write will augment their capacity for evil. See Dihkhuda, *Amsal va Hikam*, p. 921.

40. Dihkhuda, *Amsal va hikam*, p. 919.
41. *Kulliyat*, p. 24. Many writers place women and children in a single category below men. The author of the *Qabusnamah*, for example, advises his son to "quarrel with nobody; quarreling is not indulged in by men of dignity; but rather by women and little children (p. 55; trans. Levy, p. 69). Similarly, a chapter in the *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* (p. 231) teaching men the correct way to address others advises them to be "cautious in addressing common people, children, women, madmen, and drunken persons," trans. Wickens, p. 174.
42. *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, p. 169, trans. Wickens, p. 123.
43. "Gulistan," *Kulliyat*, p. 79; trans. Rehatsek, p. 76. For similar remarks on woman's cowardice and man's bravery see the "Bustan," *Kulliyat*, pp. 265, 266; trans. Wickens, ll. 1085, 1087, 1096.
44. "Bustan," *Kulliyat*, p. 283, trans. Wickens, ll. 1482-83.
45. "Gulistan," *Kulliyat*, pp. 209, 204; trans. Southgate.
46. Faramarz al-Arjani, *Samak-i 'Ayyar*, ed. Parviz Natal Khanlari. *Bunad-i Farhang-i Iran*, No. 52 (Tehran: 1347/1969), I, 47.
47. Pp. 196-97.
48. "Bustan," *Kulliyat*, p. 257; trans. Wickens, l. 887.
49. "Tayyibat," *Kulliyat*, p. 583.
50. "Gulistan," *Kulliyat*, pp. 106-7; trans. Rehatsek, pp. 111-13.
51. "Bustan," *Kulliyat*, p. 371; trans. Wickens, ll. 3407-9.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 371-72; trans. ll. 3414-41, and "Gulistan," *Kulliyat*, pp. 177, 178; trans. 209, 210.
53. *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, pp. 237-38; trans. Wickens, pp. 178-79.

54. *Kulliyat*, p. 31.
55. "Bustan," *Kulliyat*, p. 390; trans. Wickens, l. 3856.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 361-62, trans. ll. 3187-3220.
57. Jalal al-Din Muhammad al-Diwani (L.k.h.n.v. [1957]), pp. 192ff., trans. W. F. Thompson, *Practical Philosophy of the Muhammedan People* (Karachi: Karimsons, 1977), pp. 262-74.
58. *The Quran*, iv, 34; quoted in *A Dictionary of Islam*, p. 671.
59. *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, p. 215; trans. Wickens, p. 161.
60. P. 93; trans. Levy, p. 118.
61. *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, pp. 215-16; trans. Wickens, p. 161. See also the *Qabusnamah*, pp. 129-30; trans. Levy, p. 117.
62. *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, p. 219; trans. Wickens, p. 164. The *Qabusnamah* gives the husband similar advice, adding, "even though you may be infatuated with her do not spend every night in her society," p. 94; trans. Levy, p. 119.
63. *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, p. 217; trans. Wickens, p. 162.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 219; trans. 164.
65. *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 94; trans. pp. 108, 119.
66. "Gulistan," *Kulliyat*, p. 123; trans. Rehatsek, p. 134.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 166; trans. p. 193.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 178; trans. p. 209. For other examples see pp. 90-91 and 124 in the original and pp. 90-92 and 135 in the translation.
69. "Bustan," *Kulliyat*, p. 362; trans. Wickens, ll. 3221-26. See also pp. 299 and 300 in the original and ll. 1827-38 and 1852-62 in the translation.

70. "Gulistan," *Kulliyat*, p. 156; trans. Rehatsek, p. 179.
71. *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), IV (E), ll. 1268-70.
72. "Gulistan," *Kulliyat*, pp. 179; trans. Rehatsek, p. 211.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 176; trans. p. 207.
74. *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, pp. 220-21; trans. Wickens, p. 165.
75. "Hazliyyat," pp. 341-42.
76. Robert Surieu, *Sarve Naz*, p. 172. For a description of the Safavid harem see Chardin, *Voyages du Chevalier Chardin en Perse* (Paris: Le Norman, Imprimeur-Libraire, 1811), VI, 6-32.
77. Surieu, p. 16.
78. "Terminal Essay," *Arabian Nights*, X, 180, 179; I, 211.
79. Zabihullah Safa, *Tarikh-i adabiyyat dar Iran* (Tehran: Ibn-i Sina, 1339/1961), II, 69-77; 121-24.
80. *Kulliyat*, pp. 583-84.
81. *Kulliyat*, p. 749.
82. Ed. Muhtaba Minuvi (Tehran: Kavah, n.d.), pp. 71-72. See also Robert Surieu, pp. 85ff.
83. *Nawruznamah*, p. 76.
84. "Gulistan," *Kulliyat*, p. 146; trans. Rehatsek, p. 166.
85. *Nawruznamah*, p. 73. See Plato's "Symposium," in *The Dialogues of Plato*, ed. and trans. B. Jowett (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), I, 478-555.
86. *Nawruznamah*, pp. 72-73.
87. "Bustan," *Kulliyat*, p. 365; trans. Wickens, ll. 3283-85.

88. These numbers refer to the Rehatsek translation of the "Gulistan." The anecdotes are not numbered in the Furughi edition, but if numbered 1 through 21 they will correspond to the English.
89. "Gulistan," *Kulliyat*, p. 160; trans. Rehatsek, p. 185.
90. *Ibid.*, p. 164; trans. p. 190.
91. For an analogue see the *Arabian Nights*, the 382nd Night, V, 65-68.
92. "Gulistan," *Kulliyat*, p. 163; trans. Rehatsek, p. 188.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 169; trans. 197.
94. These numbers refer to the Wickens translation of the "Bustan," where the anecdotes are numbered 43 through 62. Anecdotes are not numbered in the Furughi edition, but if numbered 43 through 62 they will correspond to the English.
95. Badi'ullah Dabirinizhad, "Tasavvuf dar nazar-i Sa'di," *Maqalati darbarah-yi zindigi va shi'r-i Sa'di*, pp. 176-81.
96. "Bustan," *Kulliyat*, p. 305; trans. Wickens, ll. 1957-59.
97. "Badayi'," *Kulliyat*, p. 725.
98. "Bustan," *Kulliyat*, p. 357; trans. Wickens, ll. 3105-8.
99. *Ibid.*, p. 234; trans. l. 354.
100. *Ibid.*, p. 364; trans. ll. 3257, 3264-66. Several anecdotes and lyrical poems of Sa'di illustrate the *shahid's* cruel treatment of the lover. (For example, the "Bustan," *Kulliyat*, pp. 293-95, 296-97; trans. Wickens, ll. 1707-36, 1737-41, 1765-82; the "Badayi'," *Kulliyat*, p. 785; and the "Hazliyyat," p. 354.) But the lover need not suffer long, for soon the lovely down growing on the boy's upper lip becomes coarse and his beard

sprouts, destroying his beauty. Satirical Persian literature is filled with invectives about the bearded youth. (See the "Hazliyyat," pp. 344, 345; and the "Ruba'iiyyat," *Kulliiyyat*, pp. 893, 899, 902.) 'Ubayd Zakani's "Rishnamah" (The Book of the Beard) is the longest satire on the subject. A *carpe diem* dream vision in ornate prose interspersed with verse, the work reminds handsome boys that their beauty is short-lived and exhorts them to treat their admirers kindly. (See the *Kulliiyyat-i 'Ubayd Zakani*, pp. 32-42.)

101. "Bustan," *Kulliiyyat*, p. 364; trans. Wickens, ll. 3258.
102. See p. 164 in the original and p. 190 in the translation.
103. Ali Akbar Dihkhuda, *Lughatnamah*, ed. Muhammad Mu'in and Sayyid Ja'far Shahidi (Tehran, 1337-1353/1959-1979), s.v. *shahid*, pp. 160-61.
104. *Ibid.*, s.v. *amrad* and *mukhannas*.
105. "Gulistan," *Kulliiyyat*, p. 138; trans. Rehatsek, pp. 154-55. The pun on *ab* (water) and *ab-i mardan* (semen) is lost in the translation.
106. See the *Lughatnamah*, under the terms listed.
107. Quoted by Robert Surieu, *Sarve Naz*, p. 16. For the Zoroastrian condemnation of the homosexual act see the "Vendidad" in *The Zend-Avesta*, trans. James Darmesteter, Sacred Books of the East, IV (Oxford: Clarendon, 1880), pp. 101-02.
108. iv, 15 and 16.
109. vii, 80-84; xi, 77-83; xxvi, 160-74, and xxix, 28-30.
110. P. 169; trans. Wickens, pp. 123-24.
111. *Ibid.*, pp. 225, 232; trans. p. 169, 174.
112. *Ibid.*, 223-24; trans. 168; see also the *Tutinamah: Jawahir al-asmar*, pp. 27-28, where a father unsuccessfully tries to alter his son's effeminate demeanor.

It is believed here that the son is *mukhannas* because he is the fruit of incest.

113. "Bustan," *Kulliyat*, pp. 363-64; trans. Wickens, ll. 3252-55.
114. P. 79, translation mine.
115. *Qabusnamah*, p. 81; translation mine. See also the *Lughatnamah*, s.v. *ghulam*.
116. *Qabusnamah*, pp. 59-60; trans. Levy, p. 75.
117. *Ibid.*, p. 60; trans. Levy, p. 76. Levy makes the beloved female, even though the context makes a female improbable. The Nafisi edition of the *Qabusnamah* uses the masculine *ma'shuq* (beloved).
118. *Ibid.*, p. 61; trans. Levy, p. 77.
119. *Ibid.*, p. 61; trans. Levy, pp. 77, 78.
120. Pp. 124-25; trans. Rehatsek, pp. 135-38.
121. See *Lughatnamah*, s.v. *musahagah* and *tabaq zadan*, words for lesbian practices. For current religious laws against homosexual and lesbian acts (*lavat*, *musahagah*) see paragraphs 154-64 of the *Layihah-yi Qisas*, ratified by Iran's present government. Repeat offenders may be punished by death (par. 161).
122. *Voyages*, VI, 25. Translated in Robert Surieu, *Sarve Naz*, pp. 135, 145.
123. *Arabian Nights*, IV, 234, n. 1.
124. *Ibid.*, pp. 233-34.
125. On courtly love see Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Jay Parry (New York: Ungar, 1959); and C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958).
126. For edition and translation see note 32, above.

127. For edition see note 28, above.

128. *Sarve Naz*, p. 7.



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Philippe Rochard

The Identities of the Iranian *Zūrkhānah**

A MAJOR AMBIGUITY ATTACHES TO THE *ZURKHANAH*, THE TRADITIONAL GYMNASIUM of Iran. It is celebrated as an abode of chivalry and traditional values such as generosity, forbearance, and fair play, but it also has a reputation of harboring unruly elements on the margins of legality, men who are willing to rent their strong-arm services to whomever pays most. In this article I propose to explore this ambiguity and trace its roots in the social history of the institution. To do this, I shall first provide a quick update on the state of traditional athletics today, then expound on the paradox, and finally attempt to explicate it by discussing the identities of three social types that frequented the *zūrkhānah*.

A BRIEF UPDATE ON A TRADITION

The Iranian *zūrkhānah*, literally “House of Strength,” is the traditional gymnasium in which athletes practice a series of gymnastic and bodybuilding exercises that have been called “ancient sport,” *varzish-i bāstānī*, since 1934. Formerly these gymnasia mainly taught the art of Turco-Persian wrestling, but the establishment of the National Iranian Wrestling Federation in 1939 put an end to this practice. Traditional wrestling did not disappear, however, and is now called *pahlavānī* wrestling in memory of the title that used to be bestowed on the champions of this discipline,¹ but its organic link with the *zūrkhānah* has been severed. Contrary to the situation in Turkey, where there exists a corps of professional traditional wrestlers,² Iranian wrestlers only practice *pahlavānī* wrestling on the side, when a national competition is in sight; once a tournament is

Phillipe Rochard is at the Université de Strasbourg.

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1. *Pahlavānī* wrestling differs from the international freestyle variety in that bouts are longer (an echo of the time in which there were no time limits at all) and that wrestlers may grab each other's breeches, which allows for holds using the belt and the hem behind the knee. These breeches are made of reinforced cloth or leather and are called *tunbān*. See Patricia L. Baker, “Wrestling at the Victoria and Albert Museum,” *Iran* 35 (1997): 73–80.

2. See Carl Mehmet Hershisser, “Turkish Oiled Wrestling and the Commodification of Traditional Culture,” unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1998.

over, they return to their training in freestyle wrestling.³ For all intents and purposes, therefore, gymnastic and bodybuilding exercises now constitute the *zürkhānah*'s only activities.

Customarily, athletes execute the exercises in groups of between ten and fifteen in an octagonal pit (*gawd*), to the rhythmic chant of a musician, here termed *murshid*, who sits on a podium (*sardam*), and accompanies himself with a percussion instrument (*zarb*), and a bell, (*zang*). Since 1941, national Iranian radio has broadcast these rhythmic chants every morning, allowing devotees to do these exercises at home. More recently, traditional exercise sessions have begun appearing in non-traditional multi-purpose sports clubs, which reflects a change in the character of the athletes: where the older generation limited itself to ancient sport and wrestling, younger *zürkhānah* athletes also practice other disciplines such as bodybuilding, weight lifting, martial arts, even soccer. As a direct consequence of this diversification, new gymnastic movements, drawn mainly from East Asian martial arts, have begun appearing in the acrobatic improvisations (*shīrīnkārī*) that are part of a *zürkhānah* session.⁴

Space and Hierarchy

When they meet in a traditional house of strength, the athletes form a circle inside the exercise pit and face the session's exercise leader, the *miyāndār*, who occupies its center. Their precise place within the circle is determined by a hierarchy: the most senior members, the *pīshkīsvats*, occupy the place of honor closest to the *murshid*, while to their left and right younger members stand in descending order of seniority all the way to the beginners, who stand farthest from the *murshid*'s podium. The traditional classification that organized the younger members into beginners (*nawchah*) and apprentices (*nawkhwāstah*) has been gradually abandoned as modern bureaucratic structures were introduced into the world of Iranian sports. In particular, the establishment of the national wrestling federation in 1939 led to the adoption of international age categories and new collective teaching methods, which rendered the old system of apprenticeship from master to pupil obsolete.⁵ As for attire, athletes put on their breeches on special occasions and for competitions, but for their daily exercises they use the *lung*, a red square cloth wrapped around the loins and passed between the legs.

3. This absence of a specialized setting has unfortunately led to a genuine impoverishment of the knowledge of the techniques of traditional wrestling.

4. A similar process of borrowing can also be observed in *pahlavānī* wrestling, where certain new techniques can clearly be traced to judo, which some wrestlers practice on the side.

5. Most recently, this reorganization of teaching has also reached the music masters. Having been initiated into the art of chanting and drumming in collective courses, today's young *murshids* do not hesitate to claim that they are self-taught, while their elders are proud to trace their teaching lineage back three or four generations.



Fig. 1: *Shinā* (lit. “swimming”) push-up exercises with *Takht*. Zūrkhānah-i Nur, Tehran, 1994. Photographer. Ph. Rochard



Fig. 2: *Charkhīdan* (rotation) exercises, at medium speed. Zūrkhānah-i Nur, Tehran. photographer: Ph.Rochard.

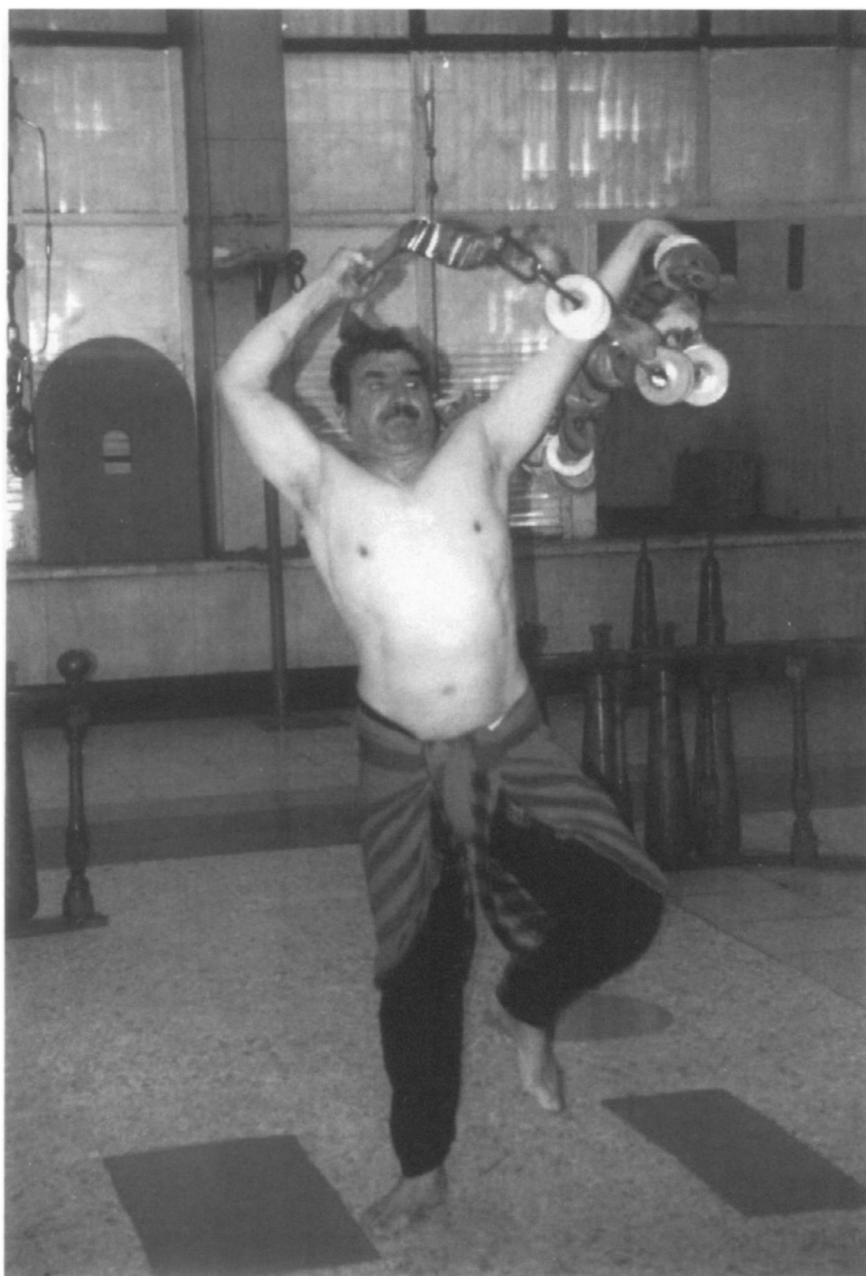


Fig. 3: *Kabbādah* exercise performed in a gymnasium. Note the *sang* in the background. Bashgah-i Sulaymaniya, Tehran, 1996. Photographer: Ph. Rochard.

Instruments and Exercises

Of the various instruments known to have existed, four are currently in use. These are the *mīl* (Indian clubs), always used in pairs and made of wood and weighing between two and twenty kilograms; the *kabbādah*, a heavy iron bow, whose weight has been fixed at between twelve and sixteen kilograms and which athletes swing from one side to the other over their heads; the *sang*, heavy wooden boards of about forty kilograms each that an athlete lifts, one in each hand, as he lies on his back; and the *takht-i shinā*, a small wooden plank used as a base for various types of push-ups. The origin and evolution of these instruments are complex and difficult to trace; the *mīl* and the *kabbādah* probably originate in ancient weaponry.

No instruments are needed for the remaining warm-up exercises and the exercises that build endurance and flexibility. Most notable among these is the *charkh*, a whirling exercise which the athletes do in ascending order of seniority, from beginners to seniors.

Ethics and Morality

The most ardent defenders of ancient sports declare that the *zūrkhānahs* teach a philosophy of life that originates in the ancient but often reformulated moral and

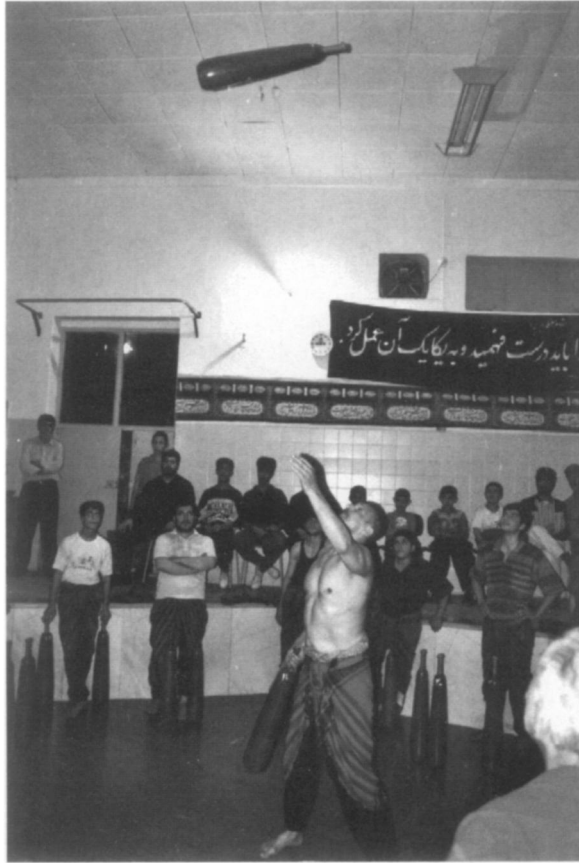


Fig. 4: Juggling with heavy *mīl*. Zūrkhānah-i Shirkat-i Naft. Photographer: Ph. Rochard.

spiritual tradition of mystical Islamic chivalry, *javānmardī*.⁶ Frequented, for obvious reasons of propriety, only by men, the *zūrkhānah* is an institution that exalts the ideals of traditional masculinity (*mardānagī*), which many take to be the same as *javānmardī*, although the former is merely a prerequisite for the latter. Thus, an exercise session provides an opportunity to remind those present, whether athletes or spectators, of their social duties, duties that include generosity, mutual help, courage, loyalty, respect for elders, and keeping one's word. These ritualistic restatements of the community's basic values allow everyone to bask in the comfort of true solidarity, as long as he is worthy of it. The *zūrkhānah* is a place where athletes can achieve social integration while at the same time distinguishing themselves, a place that offers them occasions to activate social connections and a setting in which to exercise the body.

Perpetuation and Renewal

Although for the last eighty years the *zūrkhānah* has been only one among the many places where a man can engage in physical exercise, it is not a forgotten and moribund tradition brought to life by the anthropologist. According to the head of the Iranian Federation of Ancient Sports, a total of between twenty and thirty thousand athletes engage in traditional exercises every day;⁷ and Teheran alone has over fifty gymnasias where they are practiced. There is hardly a village in Iran that does not have a house of strength, with the exception of those situated in the littoral regions of the Persian Gulf.

The rules and regulations of the *zūrkhānah* tend to adapt to the new tastes of Iranian society. Since the end of the Iran/Iraq War in 1988, Iran's Federation of Ancient Sport and Pahlavani Wrestling has tried very hard to promote the activi-

6. The literature on *javānmardī* is vast, and has been analyzed in radically different ways by different authors. See Fariba Adelkhah, *Being Modern in Iran*, trans. Jonathan Derrick (London, 1999); Cl. Cahen, and W. L. Hanaway Jr, "Ayyār" *Eir* s.v.; Cl. Cahen and Fr. Taeschner, "Futuwwa," *EI*² s.v.; Cl. Cahen, "Aḥdāth," *EI*²; Claude Cahen "Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulmane du moyen âge, I" *Arabica* 5 (1958): 225–50 and "Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l'Asie musulmane du moyen âge, II," *Arabica* 6 (1959): 25–56; Claude Cahen, "Y a-t-il eu des corporations professionnelles dans le monde musulman classique?" in A. H. Hourani and S. M. Stern, eds., *The Islamic City: A Colloquium* (Oxford and Philadelphia, 1970), 51–63; Henry Corbin *L'homme et son ange-initiation et chevalerie spirituelle* (Paris, 1983); Angelika Hartmann, *an-Nāṣir li-dīn Allāh: (1180-1225): Politik, Religion, Kultur in der späten Abbasidenzeit* (New York and Berlin, 1975); Parviz Natil Khanlari, "Ā'in-i 'ayyārī," *Sukhan* 18 (1348/1969): 1071–77, 19 (1348/1969): 19–26, 113–22, 263–67, 477–80; Muhammad-Ja'far Mahjub, *Ā'in-i javānmardī yā futuwwat* (New York, 2000); Murtaza Sarraf, ed., *Rasā'il-i javānmardān: Mushtamal bar haft futuwwat-nāmāh* (Tehran, 1973, 1991); Franz Taeschner, *Zünfte und Bruderschaften im Islam: Texte zur Geschichte der futuwwa* (Zurich, 1979); Fr. Taeschner, "Akhī," *EI*² s.v.; Jean-Claude Vadet "La Futuwwa, morale professionnelle ou morale mystique," *Revue des Études Islamiques*, 46 (1978): 57–90; and Mohsen Zakeri, *Sasanid Soldiers in Early Muslim Society: The Origins of Ayyaran and Futuwwa* (Wiesbaden, 1995).

7. Sayyid 'Abdullah Sajjadi, personal communication.

ties of which it is in charge. To counteract the young generation's waning interest in the tradition, it organizes national competitions, has a policy of appointing younger cadres, and has modified the gymnastic program to make it more varied and attractive. It even offers real training opportunities for the under sixteen year olds, who were traditionally barred from entering a house of strength. Moreover, it coordinates these policies with the provincial federations that carry them out, which is a break with the centralism of previous years. A variety of private donors (companies, generous individuals, bazaar merchants) and public sponsors (ministry of oil, ministry of culture, municipal governments, the Foundation of the Astan-i Quds in Mashhad, etc.) participate in the financing of these activities and thus encourage them. Since the election of Muhammad Khatami to the Iranian presidency in May 1997, the heads of provincial federations have acquired added importance as they now participate in the election of the head of the national federation.

As a result of these policies, the numbers of young men who participate in ancient sports has noticeably gone up. The active role that some provincial federations (notably those of Kurdistan, Khorasan, and Azerbaijan) have taken, allows one to be confident that this improvement will survive the conflicts that the innovations have generated in Teheran between traditionalists and modernizers.

Pushed by the necessity of appealing to the young, who crave glory and recognition, ancient sport has adapted itself to the tastes of the young athletes who prefer exercises of agility (e.g., whirling and juggling) to those in which strength alone matters (e.g., the iron bow). The reasons for this change in tastes are embedded in the evolution of all the other social and aesthetic standards that Iranian society has undergone since its entry into the industrial age. Movement is now more desirable than static force, and leanness more than the big belly that used to be a sign of wealth and good health. To this, one must now add the dictates of today's audiovisual media, which alone can provide the celebrity that counts in the eyes of the athletes. If one wants to be noticed, one's performance must be "brief and spectacular." Thus for the new team competitions that complement the old competitions in individual disciplines (*kabbādah*, *charkh*, etc.), the *miyāndārs* and their men prepare synchronized exercises that are carefully choreographed and whose technical and artistic merits are duly noted and rewarded by the judges.⁸

The federation is not alone in modernizing and promoting ancient sports; local and individual initiatives are numerous. In Qazvin a local official of the National Physical Education Organization has opened a school for young athletes, in Tabriz the municipality has established *zūrkhānahs* in disused public bathhouses (*hammām*), and the National Iranian Oil Company has organized a demonstration on its premises on the occasion of National Women's Day, to encourage mothers to allow their sons to attend *zūrkhānahs*. Finally, since 1997,

8. See Philippe Rochard, "Le beau geste sportif dans le sport traditionnel iranien (zurkhāne et varzesh-e bāstāni)," *Actes du colloque de la Societas Iranologica Europaea*, volume 3 (Louvain, forthcoming).

ancient sport has even had its own press publication in the form of *Rukhsat Pahlavān*, a weekly newspaper published by a veteran sports journalist in Teheran who is also a connoisseur of *zürkhānah* traditions.⁹ In sum, there is a real effort to ensure the survival of Iran's athletic traditions.

Nonetheless, there are many who speak of this tradition in elegiac tones. Where are the *pahlavāns* who used to uphold law, order, and morality in society? Where are the *pahlavāns* who brought fame to the nation? The last of these, Ghulamriza Takhti, a wrestler who was twice world champion (Teheran, 1959 and Yokohama, 1961), won an Olympic medal in Melbourne (1956), and on several occasions became national champion in traditional wrestling, died under tragic circumstances on January 7, 1968.¹⁰ Although other champions have since then won medals for Iran, it is his name that has become synonymous with honor, generosity, and honesty, and it is for this reason that his name comes up every time Iranians experience a *contretemps*, most recently at the 2000 Olympic Games in Sidney, where Iranian athletes were shown to have succumbed to the temptation of doping.

The efforts of the Federation of Ancient Sport and Pahlavani Wrestling to save Iran's athletic heritage by reforming it encounters opposition from many veterans, who are temperamentally resistant to any type of state regulation and who resent the actions of a federation that in the name of reform upsets their habits. Traditionally, the hierarchy within the world of ancient sport was established by community consensus, and a *cursus honorum* determined how one climbed within the hierarchy. As a result, an old *zürkhānahkār* respects only one whom he considers worthy of respect, one characterized by a whole range of identity markers, cultural references, and a specific code of behavior. Such organizational principles are not compatible with bureaucratic rationalization,¹¹ as expounded by the official federation.

According to the traditionalist critics, the *zürkhānah* of today is only a shadow of its former self, an evanescent memory of a time that is forever gone; a universe of which the old aficionados deem themselves to be the last remnants. Every invocation of the names of loved ones that are gone is an occasion to lament the end of this world. But what precisely is or was this world? In the following we will try to answer this question by analyzing the genealogies of its identity construction.

9. One might add that in the United States an Iranian sports website (www.sportestan.com) devotes a few pages to the tradition.

10. On Takhti see H. E. Chehabi, "Sport and Politics in Iran: The Legend of Gholamreza Takhti," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 12 (December 1995): 48–60.

11. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, (Berkeley, 1978), 956–58.

EXEGESIS AND PARADOX

The origins of the *zūrkhānah* are a matter of some controversy. What is certain is that the wrestling profession, the true driving force of the *zūrkhānah* until the twentieth century, gradually acquired its letters of nobility in the Muslim world between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, wrestlers, although they were already connected to Sufi brotherhoods, were still associated in the minds of men of letters with entertainers of lowly origin such as fire eaters and acrobats, groups that we later find at the Safavid court under the general rubric of *lūṭī*. Angelo Piemontese has speculated that the wrestlers of the Ilkhanid and Timurid periods seem to have used their double affiliation with an “ennobling” *futuwwa* and a popular Sufism to transform their profession from a simple entertainment to a recognized art. It was at the court of the Timurid Sultan Husayn Bayqara (r. 1468-1506) that this transformation bore fruit in the form of two book chapters dedicated to wrestling. The first of these was written at the ruler’s orders to celebrate his favorite wrestler, Pahlavan Darvish Muhammad,¹² and the second consisted of a chapter in Kashifi’s *Futuvvat-nāmah* that attributes many virtues and the highest significance to wrestling, even though even here they are treated together with other entertainers in one chapter.¹³ It would seem, therefore, that the *zūrkhānah* and its gymnastic program appeared around the same time that wrestling became a respectable profession, even though we have no mention of the institution in Persian texts before the end of the seventeenth century. In these pre-national times, wrestlers traveled widely in a vast region that included all the major cities of Iran and in addition stretched from Algiers to Central Asia and from Constantinople to Calcutta.¹⁴

With the founding in 1934 of the National Organization of Physical Education and Scouting and the establishment in 1939 of the Iranian Wrestling Federation, the new Iran of Reza Shah adopted the Western model of physical education developed since the early nineteenth century, and by the same token rele-

12. Zayn al-Din Mahmud Vasifi *Badāyi’ al-Waqāyi’* (Tehran, 1349/1970), chapter 19, “Dar [zīkr-i] fazāyil va kamālāt-i pahlavān Muḥammad Abū Sa’id va sāyir-i kushtigīrān-i silsilah-yi Sulṭān Husayn Mīrzā,” 489–516. On this book see Angelo Piemontese, “Il capitolo sui *pahlavān* delle *Badāyi’ al-Waqāyi’* di Vāsefi,” *Annali dell’Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*, NS, 16 (1966): 207–220.

13. Mawlana Husayn Vā’iz Kashifi Sabzavari, *Futuvvat-nāmah-i Sulṭānī*, ed. Muhammad-Ja’far Mahjub, (Tehran, 1350/1971), 306–12. On this book see Angelo Piemontese, “Il trattato sulla *Futuwwa* (*Fotuvvatnāme-ye solṭānī*) di Hosein Vā’ez Kāsefi. Relazione preliminare,” in *Atti di terzo congresso di studi Arabi e Islamici, Ravello, 1-6 Settembre 1966* (Naples, 1967), 557–63; and Angelo Piemontese, “L’organizzazione della «Zurxāne» e la «Futuwwa»,” *Annali dell’Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*, NS, 14 (1964): 453–73.

14. See Marius Canard, “La lutte chez les arabes,” in *Le cinquantenaire de la Faculté des lettres d’Alger (1881-1931)* (Algiers, 1932). See Abu l-Fazl Allami, *The Ain-i Akbari*, trans. H. Blochmann, (Delhi, 1989, reprint), 263. Cf. also Cl. Huart, “Janissaries” in *El*¹ s.v. on the eventful introduction of acrobats and wrestlers in the Ottoman elite corps.

gated its native athletic culture to the domain of "tradition." It is at this point that the *zūrkhānah* became an object of history and found a place in the national identity discourse, while, as we saw in the beginning, the exercises and the wrestling that were carried out in it became known as "ancient sport" and "*pahlavānī* wrestling."

Different interpretative exegeses of the *zūrkhānah* tradition gradually began appearing in the late 1940s, in the wake of Muhammad-Taḳī Bahar's seminal works on *javānmardī*.¹⁵ Bahar was followed by others who expanded on his ideas.¹⁶ Even though these studies mentioned the *zūrkhānah* only in passing, they were seized upon to construct histories of the institution that purported to show it to have been, depending on the author's political views, a training ground for chivalrous heroes, a center of popular resistance against the various invaders that overran Iran in the course of its long history, or the headquarters of the defenders of the common people's rights vis-à-vis all those who violated them.¹⁷ The revolution of 1978–79 put the *zūrkhānah* in a purgatory for a few years on account of the well-known collusion between the most famous and influential proponent of ancient sports in prerevolutionary Iran, Shaḥban Jaḥfari,

15. Muhammad-Taḳī Bahar (1866–1951) was the last Iranian poet laureate (*malik al-shuʿarā*). A scholar, writer, professor at Tehran University, journalist, and politician, his œuvre consists of a two-volume *divan*, a three-volume study of literary style, and, more relevant for our purposes, an edition of *Tārīkh-i Sīstān* and the *Majmaʿ al-tavārikh wa lʿqīṣaṣ*. His work on the latter two texts spawned a series of articles on *javānmardī* that can be found in Ihsan Naraqi, ed., *Āʿīn-i javānmardī*, (Tehran, 1363/1984).

16. See for instance the series of articles by Parviz Natil Khanlari cited in footnote 6. Mahjub also edited the *Futuvvatnāmah-i Sulṭānī* (see footnote 13). See also Murtaza Sarraf, ed., *Rasāʾil-i javānmardān: Mushtamal bar haft futuvvatnāmah* (Tehran, 1973, 1991) with an analytic introduction by Henry Corbin; and Henry Corbin, *L'homme et son ange—initiation et chevalerie spirituelle* (Paris, 1983).

17. Hasan Gushah, "Varzish-i bāstānī dar Īrān," *Payām-i naw*, 3: (1326/1947): 47–55; Husayn Partaw Bayzaʿī's Kashani, *Tārīkh-i varzish-i bāstānī-yi Īrān: Zūkhānah* (Tehran, 1958); K. Kazemaiṇī and Samuel S. Babayan, *Zoorkhaneh: Iranian Ancient Athletic Exercises* (Tehran, 1964); Kazim Kazimayni, *Dāstānhā-yi shigiftangīz az tārikh-i pahlavānī-yi Īrān* (Tehran, 1346/1967); idem, *Naqsh-i pahlavān va nahẓat-i ʿayyārī* (Tehran, 1343/1964); Mustafa Sadiq, "Gawd-i muqaddas: paydāyish-i zūrkhānah" *Hunar va mardum*, no. 145 (Aban 1353/October–November 1975); Ghulamriza Insafpur, *Tārīkh va farhang-i zūrkhānah va gurūh-hā-yi ijtīmāʿī-yi zūrkhānah-raw* (Tehran, 1353/1974); to mention only the principal sources. These works are of very uneven scholarly value. The richest of all is the book of Partaw Bayzaʿī, by far the most thorough study ever made of the *zūrkhānah*. More recently, Sadriddin Ilahi has provided an original and critical analysis that breaks with the celebratory discourse of Kazimayni and refutes the outdated thesis of the mithraic origins of ancient sports, as formulated by Mihrdad Bahar in his "Varzish-i bāstānī-yi Īrān va rīshah-hā-yi tārikhī-yi ān," *Tchistā* 1 (October 1981), reprinted in Duktur Mihrdad Bahar, *Az usṭūrah tā tārikh*, ed. Abulqasim Ismaʿīlpur (Tehran, 1376/1997), 27–41. See Sadriddin Ilahi, "Niḡāhī digar bih sunnatī kuhan: zurkhānah," *Īrānshināsī* 6 (1994): 731–38.

and the shah's regime,¹⁸ but when it revived in the mid-1980s, the young leaders of the new Federation of Ancient Sport and Pahlavani Wrestling deliberately put the mystical Islamic tradition, which will be discussed below, in the foreground. This discourse was accepted by the authorities of the Islamic Republic and provided immunity against persecution.¹⁹ The accumulated *topoi* of these successive constructions, which complement rather than contradict each other, continue to inform today's official celebratory discourse.

The fact remains that in spite of this celebratory discourse the institution remains stigmatized in the popular imagination as a den of ruffians (*gardan-kuluft*, *sībīl-kuluft*, *jāhil*) who are happy to lend their services to whoever pays most and who indulge in some of the vices that are condemned most by Iranian society, from homosexuality and pederasty to columbophilia and racketeering. This stigmatization has a long history. During the Qajar period it was not rare for local notables or even *mujtahids* to resort to local gang leaders with *zūrkhānah* connections to enhance their power in an urban quarter so as to oppose a rival or even the local governor,²⁰ and later *zūrkhānahs* were readily accused of harboring thugs whom the bosses of the local criminal underground recruited to do their dirty work.

The fact is that an ambiguity attaches to the image of the Iranian "strong man" that makes him either a hero or a rascal. The world of the *zūrkhānah* continues to suffer, unjustly, from this image, and to reconcile the two, it has been repeatedly asserted that the originally noble tradition degenerated morally under the later reign of Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848-1896). But such a view has no basis in fact, and the moral rectitude of pre-Qajar *pahlavāns* is always asserted rather than proven. If the ambiguity is not of recent origin, how, then, can it be explained?

It seems that from the very beginning there was some real confusion about who the men that frequented the *zūrkhānah* (especially those who made a living

18. Jaʿfari was in fact a major figure in the uprising that accompanied the 1953 coup d'état against Prime Minister Musaddiq, which brought the shah to power.

19. See, for instance, the speech by then President ʿAli-Akbar Hashimi Rafsanjani when he awarded the armlet of honor to the national *pahlavānī* wrestling champion in 1993 at the *zūrkhānah* of the Bank Mellī, where he said: "Here we see *ʿirfān* (mysticism) at its height, but in a language that is simple, informal, and understandable by everybody." *Pūryā-yi Valī* no. 1 (18 Azar 1372/9 December 1993), 2.

20. On *lūtīs* see H. G. Migeod, "Die Lutis. Ein Ferment des städtischen Lebens in Persien," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 2 (1959); Reza Arasteh, "The Character, Organization, and Social Role of the *Lutis* (Javanmardan) in the Traditional Iranian Society of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 4 (1961); W. M. Floor, "The Lutis—A Social Phenomenon in Qajar Persia," *Die Welt des Islams* 13 (1971): 103–20; Willem M. Floor, "The Political Role of the Lutis in Iran," in Michael E. Bonine and Nikki R. Keddie, eds., *Modern Iran: The Dialectics of Continuity and Change* (Albany, 1981), 83–95; Jaʿfar Shahri, *Tārīkh-i ijtimāʿī-yi Tihārān dar qarn-i sīzdahum*, volume 1 (Tehran, 1990), 410–11; Ilahi, "Nigāhī dīgar;" and Aladin Goushegir, *Le combat du colombophile: Jeu aux pigeons et stigmatisation sociale* (Tehran, 1997).

from their physical aptitudes) really were. To shed light on this question, we have only three known treatises that deal with the actual athletic exercises performed in the *zūrkhānah*: an anonymous late Safavid text titled *Ṭūmār-i afsānah-i Pūryā-yi Valī*,²¹ a *masnavī* written in 1700 by the poet Mir Najat Isfahani titled *Gul-i kushṭī*,²² and, more recently, an illustrated manuscript titled *Ganjīnah-i kushṭī* and written in 1875 by one ʿAli-Akbar b. Mahdi al-Kashani.²³ It is noteworthy that in all three one senses a certain tension between what must have been the daily practice of the athletes and the idealizing discourse that was constructed on the basis of this practice beginning at the late fifteenth-century Timurid court in Herat. The purpose of this discourse was the legitimization of wrestling. It reflected the mystical and religious background that structured the *weltanschauung* of that epoch, and furnished the cultural referents that could confer legitimacy on the athletes' activities, including wrestling. Using wrestling as a metaphor, three main themes were developed: the believer's struggle against himself to attain mystical illumination, the need to put force in the service of justice, and the rules of conduct that link the initiated to each other.²⁴ This intellectual reflection on the legitimate place of force in society and the confusion between the different social and mystical dimensions of *futuwwa/javānmardī* that inspired men of the sword, mystics, and artisans, combined to endow wrestling with an aura of respectability. By the same token, it blinded the early scholars of the *zūrkhānah* to the quotidian and popular dimension of its practices, and to the fact that those who engaged in them were for the most part of humble origin: far from aspiring to mystical illumination, many of them used their skills to make a living as entertainers. Thus the seventeenth century traveler Sir John Chardin wrote:

Wrestling is the Exercise of People in a lower Condition; and generally Speaking, only of People who are Indigent. They call the Place where they Show themselves to *Wrestle*, *Zour Kone*, that is to say, *The House of Force*. They have of'em in all the Houses of their great Lords, and especially of the Governours of Provinces, to Exercise their People.

21. The text was first published by Partaw Bayzaʿi, *Varzish-i bāstānī-yi Īrān*, 350–64, but its current location is unknown.

22. *Gul-i kushṭī*, “flower of wrestling,” is actually a genre that consists of poetry that uses the terminology of wrestling. Mir Najat’s is the most famous of these poems, and its manuscript was rediscovered by Adib al-Mulk Farahani. It is also printed in Partaw Bayzaʿi, *Varzish-i bāstānī-yi Īrān*, 379–419.

23. A teacher (?) at the country’s first modern school, the Dar al-Funun, he wrote the book under the auspices of the minister of science (i.e., education), ʿAli-Qulī Mirza, Iʿtizād al-Saltāna, who was also director of the Dar al-Funun (see Abbas Amanat, “Eʿteżād-al-saltāna,” *Elr*, s.v.). Its only extant copy is in the National Library in Paris. ʿAli-Akbar ibn-i Mahdi al-Kashani, *Ganjīnah-yi kushṭī*, 1292/1875. E Blochet, *Catalogue des manuscrits persans de la Bibliothèque Nationale*. Tome II (No. 721–1160) Paris, 1912. Cote: Supplément 1169.

24. See Piemontese, “L’organizzazione della «Zurxāne» e la «Futuwwa».”

Every Town has besides Companies of those Wrestlers for show. They call the *Wrestlers Pehelvon*, a Word which signifies Brave, Intrepid. They perform their Exercises to divert People; for this is a Show, as I have said.²⁵

Let us therefore try to understand who exactly these athletes were, and how they contributed to the construction of the paradoxical image of the *zūrkhānah*.

THREE EMBLEMATIC FIGURES OF THE ZŪRKHĀNAH

In Europe the idea that the practice of sport can have hygienic and educational benefits and is useful to a nation's well-being is of relatively recent origin. It appeared sometime between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, and was widely adopted by educationalists towards the end of the nineteenth century. It is therefore quite remarkable that as early as 1875 Iranian authorities had the Dar al-Funun prepare a treatise on wrestling and gymnastics based on *zūrkhānah* exercises.²⁶ However, the idea was not followed up, and when more than half a century later legislative measures were taken in 1927 and especially in 1934 to make physical education part of the national curriculum, Western models were chosen, not indigenous practices. Why did it take the Iranian authorities so long? When one looks at how other Asians approached the corporal techniques that turned into modern sports at the dawn of the twentieth century, one must conclude that these techniques were the domain either of privileged social strata with time to spare or of men who used them to make a living as soldiers or entertainers. All these activities had their own specific codes and were associated with specific life styles, which means that by definition one cannot extrapolate from their practitioners to the rest of the population. This may explain why no attempt was made to derive a national physical education curriculum from the traditional exercises. Which were the professions that were likely to be taken up by the members of a *zūrkhānah* until the beginning of the twentieth century?

To answer this question, we can look at the *Tadhkirat al-Mulūk* of Mirza Sami^ca, an administrative treatise of late Safavid provenance. In this book we find on a list of court officials a *pahlavānbāshī*, a *lūībāshī*, and a *shātirbāshī*. When the Turkish word *bāshī* was added to a professional designation, the resulting term denoted an intermediary official between the court and the membership of a professional guild.²⁷ As a privileged interlocutor of the guild from which he himself had risen, the *bāshī* personally recruited those who would

25. Sir John Chardin, *Travels in Persia, 1673-1677* (New York, 1988), 200–201.

26. See footnote 23.

27. Muhammad-Taqi Danishpazhuḥ, "Dastūr al-mulūk-i Mīrzā Rafī^cā va Taẓkirat al-mulūk-i Mīrzā Samī^cā," *Majalla-i Dānishkadah-i Adabiyāt va 'Ulūm-i Insānī-yi Dānishgāh-i Tih-rān* 15 (1347/1968): 475–504; 16 (1347/1968): 62–93, 298–322, 416–440, 540–564. See also Mehdi Keyvani, *Artisans and Guild Life in the Later Safavid Period: Contributions to the Social-Economic History of Persia* (Berlin, 1982).

enter the services of the shah. He thus endeavored to recruit the best men and negotiated the terms of their employment with them: income, lodging, duties, etc. For example, the *pahlavānbāshī*, who was in charge of wrestlers, organized, among other things, the yearly Nawruz tournament that took place in the presence of the shah and at the conclusion of which the winner would be designated *pahlavān-i pāytakht* (champion of the capital) for the following year.

The titles of these royal functionaries point to the three emblematic figures of *zūrkhānah* culture up to the end of the Qajar period. They confirm the existence of three officially recognized professional categories that fashioned the social identity of the houses of strength. A closer look at the *lūṭī* and the *shāṭir* will enable us to begin making sense of the paradoxical reputation of the *zūrkhānah*.

The Lūṭī

In the *Tadhkirat al-Mulūk*, the *lūṭībāshī* is registered as the head of the king's acrobat/clowns. By contrast, Mir Najat Isfahani in his *Gul-i kushī* of 1700 uses the term *lūṭī* in the sense of "companion of God."²⁸ It is true that the word *lūṭī* connotes, among other things, "companion," but it is also true that for many it derives from the root *l-w-ṭ*, which may be related to the name of the Prophet Lot of the Old Testament, and which, perhaps on account of Sodom and Gomorrah, furnishes the word *lawāṭ* to designate homosexuality, an association that has always weighed heavily on the reputation of the *zūrkhānah*. By the mid-twentieth century, the term connoted a lifestyle, argot, and code of behavior espoused by the gang leaders of the cities' traditional neighborhoods. It designated anything from good fellows, pleasant boon companions, and womanizers, men who transgressed some social norms but nonetheless had a certain sense of honor, to members of the criminal underworld, as depicted in Sadegh Hedayat's short story *Dāsh Ākul* or the film *Qayṣar*.²⁹ These men often put themselves at the service of local notables who used their muscle and networks of acolytes to help establish their influence in an urban neighborhood, which was a necessary first step towards controlling a city in its entirety.³⁰

The change in the meaning of the word *lūṭī* must have occurred in the mid-nineteenth century, for at the beginning of that century *lūṭīs* were still recognized as a professional category, as the following quote shows:

Many gentlemen maintain troupes of young Georgians who can sing, play various instruments, perform feats of flexibility, and serve their pleasures. Persons of lesser rank bring musicians and dancers from outside. Beyond these, there exists a class of people known as *loufti* (sic),

28. Bayza'i, *Varzish-i bāstānī-yi Īrān*, 394.

29. For the real story that inspired Sadegh Hedayat see Hamid Nafici, "Iranian Writers, the Iranian Cinema, and the Case of *Dash Akol*," in *Iranian Studies* 18 (1985): 244–45.

30. Willem Floor's writings are very illuminating on the role of *lūṭīs* in local politics. See footnote 20 for references.

who go from house to house and entertain by telling a host of adventure stories that are all extremely indecent; they also perform feats of contortion and know how to make things disappear.³¹

Iranian rulers thus had troupes of entertainers, and court officials dealt with the *lūṭibāshī* to organize various celebrations. These entertainers have left a trace in such *zūrkhānah* exercises as *mīlbāzī*, where the athlete juggles with two, three, or four Indian clubs while making pirouettes with his feet, or in exercises in which the athlete walks on his hands, jumps backwards and forwards, or puts his head on the ground and his legs in the air.

The Shātīr

According to Muʿin's Persian dictionary, the word *shātīr* has four meanings: 1) clever, 2) nimble, 3) the baker who puts the dough into the oven, and 4) royal couriers who delivered messages running.³² What the dictionary neglects to mention is that the baker/*shātīr* keeps a steady rhythm with little hops as he takes a lump of dough from the kneader, flattens it, and places it in the oven. The detail is significant, for it helps us to make sense of the variegated and apparently unrelated meanings of the term: all of them point to a guild of footmen and couriers who had different functions, functions that evolved somewhat between the sixteenth and the early twentieth centuries.

We find early equivalents of the *shātīr* in thirteenth-century China at the service of the Grand Khan, as described by Marco Polo, and in fourteenth-century India, as recorded by Ibn Battuta. When Ibn Battuta stayed in the city of Multan, where he had to wait for a safe-conduct before going on, he saw two courier services. One, called *ūlāq*, was on horseback, the other, for which no name is provided, was on foot. The foot couriers took messages all the way to Delhi in relays, and at the entrance of each village three pavilions were set up in which fresh couriers waited to relieve the incoming ones.³³

In Iran, *shātīrs* appear both as messengers and as servants who accompany or precede the men of importance who employ them. Armed with a long stick and girded with a belt to which three small bells were attached to announce their arrival, they would open a way for their master. The Venetian envoy Michele Membrè has left this account of Shah Tahmasb:

When the King rides about 10 footmen go before him, who are called *shātīrs*; each of them wears a white cloth skirt, cut short to the knees;

31. Amable Louis Marie Michel Brechillet Jourdain, *La Perse* (Paris, 1814), 4: 233–34.

32. Dr. Muhammad Muʿin, *Farhang-i fārsī*, (Tehran, 1343/1964), s.v.

33. *Travels of Ibn Battūta, A.D. 1325-1354*, trans. H. A. R. Gibb, (Cambridge, 1958), 594. For an exhaustive study of mail services in Asia see Didier Gazagnadou, *La poste à relais: la diffusion d'une technique de pouvoir à travers l'Eurasie, Chine, Islam, Europe* (Paris, 1994).

and they wear trousers, and have plumes on their heads, and on the front of their belts, a little bell.³⁴



Fig. 5: *Shāṭīrs* (runners) on duty surrounding a young prince, late Qajar period.
Source: Kazim Kazimayni, *Naqsh-i pahlavān*.

Shāṭīrs were also sent forward to greet important guests such as ambassadors and accompany them to their residence. In the mid-eighteenth century, the caravan of the Italian traveler, Giovanni Gemelli Careri, lost in the desert, found its way thanks only to a *shāṭīr* who had been sent to greet it.³⁵

Jean-Baptiste Tavernier provides us with a detailed description of a seventeenth-century celebration in the course of which a *shāṭīr* became a full member of the guild. He had to run the distance between the main square of Isfahan, the Maydan-i Shah, and a rock situated about one *lieue* and a half (about six kilometers) outside the city twelve times, starting at dawn and ending at sunset. Each time he returned to the *maydān*, courtesans invited by his master would wipe his sweat and caress him. At the conclusion, he would be solemnly received into the guild as a full member by the principal *shāṭīrs* of the shah.³⁶

The *shāṭīr*-messenger is also well attested in Persian sources. Iʿtimad al-Saltana tells us in one of his books that up to the end of Nasir al-Din Shah's reign (1848–96), the royal household included a *shāṭīrbāshī* who headed the *shāṭīrkhānah* that included a *nāyib* (deputy), a *sarrishtahdār* (book-keeper), *mushrif* (overseer of expenses), and a number of *taḥvildārs* (couriers), this last

34. Michele Membrè, *Mission to the Lord Sophy of Persia (1539-1542)*, trans. with Introduction and Notes by A. H. Morton (London, 1993), 24.

35. Francis [Giovanni Francesco] Gemelli Careri, "A Voyage around the World," trans. from the Italian, in Awnsham and John Churchill, eds., *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (London, 1745), 168, as quoted in Keyvani, *Artisans*, 95.

36. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Voyages en Perse* (Geneva, 1970), 52–53.



Fig. 6: *Shātirs*, late Qajar period. Source: Kazim Kazimayni, *Naqsh-i pahlavānān*.

pointing to the original function of the *shātirs*.³⁷ Pierre-André Feuvrier, the shah's physician, left this description of *shātirs* accompanying the shah's carriage as he returned from Europe on 14 September 1889:

Next to every horse and by the doors of the Brougham were six tall fellows armed with a long staff and wearing very peculiar headgear: these are the runners of the King (*shātir*).³⁸

Thanks to the explanations provided by Feuvrier's traveling companion, I'timad al-

Saltana, he distinguishes between the *shātirs* who were directly attached to the person of the ruler, the *farrāshs*, true footmen who pitched and struck the tents, and *kishiks*, mounted guards who used walking sticks with silver knobs and accompanied the caravan. The *shātirs* ran on foot exactly the same route that the shah took in his horse-drawn carriage. Thus these men of legendary endurance, whose guild was connected directly to the person of the ruler, had a continuity that lasted for many centuries.

With the development of more rapid modes of communication around the turn of the last century, the *shātirs* become a mere guard of honor which the Qajars maintained until the dynasty's demise in 1925. By turning his back on the traditional ways of representing power, Reza Shah deprived the guild of its last *raison d'être*. The character of the *shātir* survived for a few more years in the traditional Iranian passion plays, the *ta'ziya*, until they were outlawed by Reza Shah in the 1930s. When the *ta'ziya* reappeared in the 1960s, the *shātir* had been forgotten.

The old athletes of the Qajar era that Partaw Bayza'i interviewed at the end of the 1950s remembered the *shātir*. Like wrestlers and *lūṭīs*, *shātirs* too fre-

37. Muhammad Hasan Khan I'timad al-Saltanah, *Chihil sāl tārikh-i Īrān dar dawrah-yi pādishāhī-yi Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh*. Jild-i avval: *al-Ma'āṣir wa'l-āṣār*, ed. Iraj Afshar (Tehran, 1363/1984), 45 and 395.

38. Docteur Feuvrier, *Trois ans à la cour de Perse* (Paris, 1900), 47–48.

quented *zürkhānahs* until 1925, although most of their training took the form of long foot races. The memory of an instrument that has now disappeared from the gymnasias, the *takhtah shilang*, is a reminder that wrestlers and *shāṭirs* used to exercise together. It was a wooden plank that was placed on the walls of the pit which the athletes tried to touch with their feet while they jumped and also used for various sorts of somersaults.³⁹ At present, a number of warm-up exercises are attributed to the *shāṭirs* of yore, such as *pā-zadan*, which consists of running in place, and special exercises for making the heels and wrists supple. These last remind one of the little leaps of the *shāṭir-baker*.

The Descendants of Shāṭirs and Lūṭīs in Collective Memory

There is no trace of the *shāṭir* in contemporary Iranian society except for the baker who puts the dough in the oven while hopping around. The term *lūṭī*, on the other hand, has come to designate a certain class of men with a dubious morality. However, in a second reversal of sense, the word *lūṭī* also signifies men who, although not quite respectable company, are shrewd and have a certain sense of honor and friendship.⁴⁰ The term has thus a negative or positive connotation depending on the context in which it is used, for shrewdness is commonly admitted to be a necessary quality for leading a carefree life or succeeding in business.

To understand the ways in which popular memory has transmitted the values associated with the *lūṭī* and the *shāṭir*, we have to introduce a third character from popular culture, the *‘ayyār*. This character has been known in Iran since the tenth century, when the popular romances *Samak-i ‘Ayyār* and *Dārābnāmah* were written. But between the tenth and the twelfth century the meaning of the word *‘ayyār* changed from its original sense of a social group, (i.e., a band of mercenary soldiers), to a quality, namely shrewdness.⁴¹ Although the *‘ayyār* is often presented as a forerunner of the *pahlavān*, he should be carefully distinguished from him, as he is utterly different; while the latter is characterized, as we shall see in greater detail below, by his *javānmardī*, the former’s distinguishing trait is his shrewdness. A late nineteenth-century popular version of the *Iskandarnāmah* shows the connection between the *‘ayyār* and the *shāṭir*. In it we read of *‘ayyārs* who enjoy the protection of the king, Alexander, and who use the immunity provided by this protection to extort from the bazaar merchants what they cannot get by force. The interesting thing is that the illustrations of the book purporting to depict an *‘ayyār* in fact show a *shāṭir*. The conclusion is that many of the book’s anecdotes were in fact inspired by nineteenth

39. Cf. “shilang takhtah” and “takhtah shilang” in *Lughatnāmah-yi Dihkhudā*, s.v.

40. The recent Iranian film *Zīr-i nūr-i māh* (Under the Light of the Moon) provides a perfect illustration of this, showing how a young *madrasa* student is drawn, somewhat in spite of himself, to a community of homeless *lūṭīs* that includes a former strong man and a musician.

41. Marina Gaillard, “Le champ d’emploi des termes *‘ayyār* et *javānmard* dans le *Dārāb-nāme* d’Abu Tāher Tarsui,” *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures* 4: 1 (2001).

century models.⁴² We see, therefore, that in the late nineteenth century, shrewdness, a desirable quality still designated by the term *‘ayyārī*, was represented by the image of a “king’s man” called *shāṭir*, a term defined by Mo‘in’s dictionary as synonymous with “clever.” The deplorable tricks played by the *‘ayyār*, represented in the costume of a *shāṭir*, on the bazaar merchant are also close to the ways of the *lūṭīs*, who were famous for frequenting *zūrkhānahs* of questionable reputation.

While the two first emblematic characters discussed above, namely the *lūṭī* and the *shāṭir*, are the basis for the negative stigmatization of the *zūrkhānah*, the third character, the *pahlavān*, embodies its positive associations, for where the *‘ayyār/shāṭir/lūṭī* is clever and shrewd, the *pahlavān* ideally practices chivalry, *javānmardī*. Let us now turn to him.

The pahlavān

The word *pahlavān* has four meanings: hero, courageous, champion, and athlete. The first three apply directly to the mythological heroes of the *Shāhnāmah*, as seen in the title of the most important of these, Rostam, which is *jahān-pahlavān* (*pahlavān* of the world). In pre-Islamic Iran *pahlavān* was a military title, and as Marina Gaillard has shown, the moral code of Islamic chivalry, the *javānmardī*, originated with the *pahlavāns* in this sense of the term.⁴³ Because of this, some have concluded that the *zūrkhānah* has a pre-Islamic origin.⁴⁴ But it is equally plausible to assume that the word *pahlavān* just changed its meaning over the centuries, and that the *pahlavān*/athlete has no antecedent in pre-Islamic times other than the obvious fact that military leaders had to be physically fit. In the absence of hard evidence, the discussion is likely to remain inconclusive. Be this as it may, in Islamic Iran the word *pahlavān* meant only wrestler. And while it is true that wrestlers claimed exalted spiritual filiations, and that their activity was the basis for reflection and metaphor on high moral and spiritual considerations, it remains that in real life the vast majority of them were from the lower strata of society and lived not very exalted lives. The names of wrestling holds and of wrestlers themselves indicate their origin in the milieu of the bazaar and craft guilds.

Before the turning point of the 1920s and 1930s, physical and athletic activity in Iran (and also in adjoining lands) constituted a highly codified social practice, chosen by a specific group of men. The questions still stands: who were these wrestlers? And what do we know about how they carried out their profession?

42. Yuriko Yamanaka, “The Eskandar-nāme of Manuchehr-Khan-e Hakim: A 19th century Persian popular romance on Alexander,” *Actes du colloque de la Societas Iranologica Europaea* (Paris, forthcoming).

43. Gaillard, “Le champ d’emploi.” See also Mohsen Zakeri, *Sasanid Soldiers in Early Muslim Society*.

44. Bahar, “Varzish-i bāstānī-yi Īrān.”

Rare are the documents that allow us to answer this question. The richest in information was written in late Safavid times and is titled *Ṭumār-i afsānah-i Puryā-yi Valī*.⁴⁵ It is a craft treatise that presents the origins of wrestling through the legend of its patron saint, Pūryā-yi Valī, as the name is pronounced today. To appreciate the originality of this document, however, it is first necessary to present the tradition of this legendary man who was a source of legitimacy for the practitioners of the art of wrestling. Purya-yi Vali is a character at the interface of myth and history in the sense that while he did exist, the legends that have come to surround him are unconnected to the facts of his biography. As a saint, his name was still the object of Iranian Sufis' *zīkr* (repetitive commemoration) at the beginning of the eighteenth century.⁴⁶

Purya-yi Vali

In 1322 a man died in the oasis of Khiva whose mystical teachings would be respected two centuries later by the wrestlers of Central Asia, Turkey, and Iran.⁴⁷ This man was Pahlavan Mahmud "Pur-yar" Khwarazmi, called Purya-yi Vali in contemporary Persian.⁴⁸ Writing under the *takhalluṣ* (pen name) of Qat-tali (from Arabic: combative), he left a poetic œuvre that summarizes his teachings and advocates the control of passions, going beyond appearances, and abandoning the pride that one might derive from physical force in favor of mystical illumination.

Purya-yi Vali was born in the city of Urgench, in the land of Khwarazm, in the thirteenth century. Having been conquered and devastated by the Mongols in the early thirteenth century, the area was once again flourishing by his time. He seems to have been the leader of the wrestlers of the governor of Khiva, who ruled the oasis on behalf of the Grand Khan of the Golden Horde, to which Khiva had fallen after the division of Genghis Khan's conquests among his heirs.

At the height of his career, Purya-yi Vali received an illumination during a bout against a young Indian champion that took place in the presence of the governor.⁴⁹ Moved by the tears of his adversary's mother, who had prayed for her son's victory, he deliberately allows himself to be thrown. As he lies on his

45. See footnote 21.

46. "Gul-i kushtī," in Partaw Bayza'i, *Varzish-i bāstānī-yi Īrān*, 399. This text states that the *zīkr* was carried out by pronouncing the name of Purya-yi Vali. By 1875, however, the *murshids* of Tehran invoked only Qutb al-Din Haydar, the disciple of Jamal al-Din of Savah and a patron saint of wandering dervishes known as Qalandar or Khaksar. al-Kashani, *Ganjīnah-yi kushtī*, 4.

47. All information about Purya-yi Vali's life is taken from Angelo Piemontese, "La leggenda del santo-lottatore Pahlavān Mahmud Xvārezmi «Pūryā~ye Vali» (m. 722/1322)," *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*, NS, 15 (1965): 167–213.

48. On the variations of his name among Iranians and Turks, see *ibid.*, 169–73.

49. There are different versions of this seminal story. See *ibid.*

back, beaten, he realizes that the greatest victory is the victory one achieves over oneself. A little while later, he saves his sovereign's life under dramatic circumstances using his superhuman strength, whereupon the ruler wonders how a man so strong could have been thrown by the young Indian wrestler. In response, Purya recites the gist of his teachings, concluding with a quatrain that is still quoted by every veteran athlete in Iran:

Gar bar sar-i nafs-i khūd amīrī, mardī
var bar digarī nuktaḥ nagīrī, mardī
mardī nabuvad fitādaḥ rā pāy zadan
gar dast-i fitādaḥ rā bigīrī, mardī

If you can dominate your own self, you're a man
If you don't find fault with others, you're a man
It is not manly to kick one who's down
If you take the hand of the one who is down, you're a man

After this lesson, some versions of the legend relate that Purya-yi Vali went out to the steppe, where he suddenly saw a gazelle appear out of nowhere. It came to him, and in its horns it carried the *tunbān*, the traditional trousers of *fityān* (members of the *futuwwa*), and, from then on, of wrestlers. Since he was the first link in the chain of transmission (*silsilah*), he could have received this symbol of mystic knowledge only from God Himself.

Piemontese's work shows that it was not before the beginning of the sixteenth century that Purya-yi Vali was mentioned in written sources, namely in works composed at the Timurid Court of Sultan Husayn Bayqara at Herat. These works contain the biographical details given above,⁵⁰ but the oral teachings of Purya remain a mystery. The propensity of chroniclers to ascribe what they are relating to older references is well known, which is why it is legitimate to ask oneself what the teaching of Purya really may have been. Of course it is likely that the Timurid authors were inspired by chronicles that are no longer extant, and perhaps they benefited from oral traditions, but the question remains why it was precisely at that point in history that so many authors wrote about Purya-yi Vali.

In the following century, the ruler of the Khiva oasis had a mausoleum built on the putative burial place of Purya; in times of peace he placed his banner on it. Subsequently, miracles came to be attributed to the saint and his tomb became a pilgrimage site. And it was precisely at this time that such seventeenth-century

50. These four texts are: Jami's *Nafahāt al-uns*, Kashifi's already mentioned *Futuvvat-nāmah-i Sulṭānī* the *Laṭā'if al-ṭawā'if* of Kashifi's son 'Alī b. Husayn whose *takhalluṣ* was Safi, and the *Majālis al-'ushshāq* attributed to Sultan Husayn Bayqara himself. Piemontese, "La leggenda," 168. See Jami, *Nafahāt al-uns min haḍrat al-quḍs*, ed. Mahdi Tawhidpur (Tehran, 1336/1957), 503; Mawlana Fakhr al-Din 'Alī Safi, *Laṭā'if al-ṭawā'if*, ed. Ahmad Gulchin Ma'ani (Tehran, 1337/1958), 274 and 276; and Amir Kamal al-Din Husayn Gazurgahi *Majālis al-'ushshāq (taẓkirah-yi 'urafā)*, ed. Ghulamriza Tabataba'i Majd, (Tehran, 1375/1996), 196–99.

travelers as Father Raphaël du Mans and Jean Chardin make the first references to *zürkhānahs* in their writings. It is against this background that we can finally turn to what can be regarded as the foundational text of the Iranian athletic tradition.

THE *TŪMĀR-I AFSĀNAH-I PURYĀ-YI VALĪ*

This Persian language wrestling treatise, whose name translates as “The scroll of the legend of Purya-yi Vali,” dates from late Safavid times and was written by an unknown author in Azerbaijan. It is the oldest known document that deals not only with wrestling but also, in detail, with the various exercises practiced to this day in a *zürkhānah*.

According to Partaw Bayza’i, the text’s style and tone, and its many infelicities and confusions, point to it having been dictated by a storyteller to an uncultured scribe.⁵¹ Whatever its stylistic shortcomings, the document’s contents testify to the author’s familiarity with the practices he presents, and it is therefore more likely that he was not a storyteller but a veteran wrestler, a *pīshkīsvat*. It is thus of exceptional value for us, as it reveals certain unknown aspects of the lives of those who made a profession out of wrestling.

The document begins by recounting the origins of the wrestling tradition, an exposition in the course of which the author also relates what in his eyes is the ideal initiation ritual. Then he names forty wrestling holds, while admitting that originally there were 120 of them, the rest having been forgotten. After this he turns to the twelve commandments that the *pahlavān* must respect. His enumeration only yields nine commandments, however, and even these, he tells us, are not in actual fact honored by the *pahlavāns*. At the end, the author lists nine points that he calls “the rules of wrestling,” but that are in fact only exercises to train the wrestler’s body. The treatise abruptly stops in the middle of the ninth exercise, and a piece of unknown length seems to be missing from it.

In this treatise we find the saint Purya-yi Vali in the Azerbaijani city of “Sarmas” (probably today’s Salmas) rather than in Central Asia. Purya has a dream in which the Imam ‘Ali appears to him and orders him to go to the main square of Salmas. He does as told, and when he arrives in Salmas he meets an old wrestler (*kuhnahsavār*) by the name of Shirdil (Lionheart) and forty men who tell him that they will follow him for the rest of his life—which must be interpreted as meaning that Purya will be the source of initiation of forty young athletes. The forty men come in four groups of ten each from the four cardinal points of the earth. The southern group is spiritually mandated by Baqli Shirazi (d. 1209), the northern group by Haji Bektash Vali (d. 1338), the eastern group by Imam Riza (d. 818), and the western group by Shaykh Murshid Qazi.⁵² Everyone of these forty pupils must learn three different holds from Purya, which brings us to the 120 holds mentioned above.

51. Bayza’i, *Varzish-i bāstānī-yi Īrān*, 350.

52. Nothing is known about the last, who may for that reason be an obscure near contemporary of the writer.

When a tradition conceals a quarrel over precedence

Contrary to all other traditions, where Purya-yi Vali appears as the only source for the teaching of the art of wrestling and is mandated by none other than God Himself, the author of the treatise at hand introduces a new figure who is totally unknown to the older writers of Herat: the *kuhnaḥsavār*, or veteran,⁵³ an old experienced *pahlavān* who knows a lot of techniques and teaches them, but cannot wrestle himself anymore.

This is apparent from the way the veteran makes his appearance in the story: When Purya-yi Vali arrives at the square in Salmas, he discovers an old man who still has the muscles of a Rostam. When the old man beholds Purya, he goes to him and throws himself at his feet in homage. He tells Purya that his name is Shirdil, that he is from Tabriz and lives in the Surkhab hills.⁵⁴ He was a *pahlavān* for forty years, and no one could ever equal him. Twenty years earlier he attained the rank of *kuhnaḥsavār*, and then he suddenly had a dream that revealed to him that all he had been waiting for in the last twenty years was expecting him in Salmas, adding that for sixty years he had been wandering in the world as *pahlavān* and *kuhnaḥsavār*.

According to the rest of the *tūmār*, the *kuhnaḥsavār* expected in the person of Purya nothing but an ideal “second” to teach the art of wrestling to the young athletes who arrived after the two had met. It is significant that Shirdil bows to Purya only once. Moreover, it transpires in the rest of the document that it is in fact he who is the master of ceremonies who dictates to Purya everything that he has to do. The *pahlavān* is thus put in a *de facto* position of subordination.

This fact is of capital importance, as it betrays an attempt to justify the pre-eminence of the *kuhnaḥsavār* over the *pahlavān*. By presenting his profession’s tradition in this way, the author of the text, who must be a *kuhnaḥsavār*, reiterates his role in it and thus reaffirms his rights vis-à-vis the *pahlavān*, who may or may not respect the equilibrium between them. The abundance of details in the presentation of the initiation ritual underlines the desire to embed it in a gratifying mystical tradition, although the anonymous author bitterly remarks that *pahlavāns* tend not to live up to this tradition.

But whom is the author trying to convince? It is not farfetched to suspect that the purpose of the *tūmār* was to establish the rights of the *kuhnaḥsavār* vis-à-vis a *pahlavān* in the governor’s court of justice, most probably in Tabriz. Such a preoccupation is not unique, and we know similar cases from India,⁵⁵ but

53. *Kuhnaḥ* means old, while *savār* means both “rider” and one who dominates and who is in charge.

54. Today Surkhab is the name of a quarter in Tabriz.

55. Cf. the critical analysis of the Mallapurana, an Indian treatise on the caste of wrestlers and boxers, in Veena Das, “A Sociological Approach to the Caste Puranas: A Case Study,” *Sociological Bulletin: Journal of the Indian Sociological Society* 17 (1968): 141–64. The original treatise can be found in *Mallapurāna: A Rare Sanskrit Text on Indian Wrestling Especially as Practised by the Jyesthimallas*, ed. Bhogilal

the *tūmār* allows us to see what form this quest for recognition took. To make his point, the aggrieved *kuhnaḥsavār* had to make his case in a way that people at the time would find plausible, hence the allusions to Purya-yi Vali.

How to be a good pahlavān

How are the claims of the *kuhnaḥsavār* expressed in the document? By listing the commandments that place him in the position of defender of tradition. The nine commandments contained in the *tūmār* are in fact a call to order for the *pahlavān*. They state that he has to respect the *kuhnaḥsavār* (and if he does not, “he will not be a complete man and will die young”) and equitably share with him what he earns. What form does this sharing take? The *pahlavān* has to put everything in front of the *kuhnaḥsavār*, who helps himself to what he wants. This would be the most honorable way of dividing the receipts, says the *tūmār*, but in fact it goes on to give a precise breakdown of who must get what. The *pahlavān*’s gains in an arena must be divided into ten parts: four for the *kuhnaḥsavār*, four for the *pahlavān*, and the two remaining parts to be divided among the apprentice wrestlers. The commandments also say that the *pahlavān* must show equanimity, be kind to everyone, and content himself with his part of the receipts without quibbling. The admonitions about the necessary respect for the veteran and the way in which gains have to be divided are the first and last of the commandments, respectively, and this underlines their importance, for one often begins and ends with what one deems to be specially important.

Four other commandments declare that the *pahlavān* must not neglect his prayers, lie, swear (“because they do it,” says the *tūmār*), and commit adultery (“which is the worst of things”).⁵⁶ Two other points clarify the ideal relations between the *pahlavān* and his apprentices (*nawkhwāstah*). He must not discourage them provided they take their work seriously, and he must try to maintain their self-esteem and make sure that there is no resentment between him and them. Furthermore, when he has thrown one of his pupils during the day, he must take him home in the evening, share a meal with him, console him,⁵⁷ and take him to the wrestling grounds the next day while making sure that the other apprentices do not mistreat him. He must be given money and be allowed to return home. As to a pupil who does not know his place, he must be “pitilessly thrown to the ground.”

Jayachandbhai Sandesara and Ramanlal Nagarji Mehta (Baroda, 1964). For an anthropological analysis of wrestling in India see Joseph S. Alter, *The Wrestler’s Body: Identity and Ideology in North India* (Berkeley, 1992).

56. The last phrase (*mibāyad fāsiq nabāshad*) is ambiguous, and could be taken to refer either to extramarital sexual relations or to homosexual practices. Mir Najat Isfahani’s *Gul-i kushī* leaves no doubt about the prevalence of the latter.

57. Some wits have asked me if this “consolation” took place during the night. Nothing excludes this hypothesis; according to Ja’far Shahri it was even the order of the day (Shahri, *Tārīkh*, I: 410–14), but one should not generalize.

What we can glean from the *tūmār*, then, is a description of a group of professional wrestlers comprising, first, an old *pahlavān* who embodies the collective memory of the art and who is called *kuhnaḥsavār*; second, a wrestler who does most of the training, i.e., the *pahlavān* in the strict sense of the term; and third, a group of apprentices (*nawkhwāstah*) whose number varies and who are headed by the best among them, the *pīshkhīz* ("the one who goes first"). This last one is also the *pahlavān*'s heir presumptive.

How to conduct one's career

Under the cover of listing the acts and gestures of Purya-yi Vali, the *tūmār* in fact enunciates the principles that must guide the wrestler in the pursuit of his career. In the interest of maintaining his honor and the respect owed to him, the wrestler must never remain in a city for more than one year. If not, the *tūmār* tells us, what he does becomes repetitive and he loses the advantage of novelty in the eyes of the city's inhabitants, after which they will no longer respect him.⁵⁸ Always faithful to the symbolism of the number twelve, our anonymous author describes the manner in which a young wrestler who is trying to become a *pahlavān* must manage his career in order to attain his goal. He must practice his art for twelve years, in eleven different cities, before coming back to the city from which he started out. The treatise states that a *pahlavān* cannot maintain himself at the height of his art and his physical prowess for more than twelve years, and that this itinerant life-style allows him to prolong his glory. If he wants to embark on a new cycle of twelve years, he must first find and train a definitive successor—and put a seal on wrestling (*kushtī-rā muhr kunad*).⁵⁹

The *tūmār* allows us to reconstruct the world of Iranian wrestlers, although lacunae remain. We see young apprentice wrestlers who, in all probability, belong mostly to the world of the bazaar, come to a *pahlavān* to learn the art of wrestling. The latter may be accompanied by a *kuhnaḥsavār*, or he may be hosted by the *kuhnaḥsavār* of the city in which he has settled for the season. In all probability it is this *kuhnaḥsavār* who organizes the bouts between the itinerant wrestlers and the local champions who have not fully espoused the way of life of the professional athlete, and he helps to provide entertainment for local celebrations. Those apprentices that prove to be talented can, if they want to become professionals, attach themselves to a *pahlavān* who makes a living from

58. One can surmise that his income correlates positively with the novelty of his performances.

59. One notes, of course, the impossibility for these itinerant *pahlavāns* of having a family life. Their only sexual outlets would have been temporary marriages or pederasty (*bachchah-bāzī*), but one should not overestimate the importance of these practices, as sexual abstinence (in order to save semen, his vital energy) was for a very long time a basic feature of the wrestler's hygiene. This abstinence has an old tradition, and was practiced in Ilkhanid times; cf. Piemontese, "L'organizzazione della «Zurxāne» e la «Futuwwa»," 464–65. It is also widely practiced in India, cf. Joseph S. Alter, "The celibate wrestler: Sexual chaos, embodied balance and competitive politics in north India," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 29 (1995): 109–31.

wrestling and goes wherever he can earn a living from the practice of his art: *zūrkhānahs* (where he teaches), village feasts, or rich patrons. The best among the apprentices can then prepare themselves for the annual Nawruz championship in the capital, in the hope that there they will catch the eye of the *pahlavānbāshī* or even the shah himself.

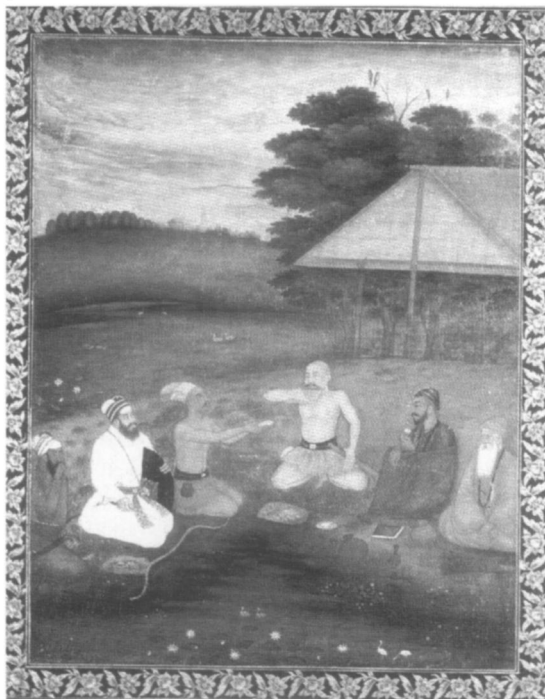


Fig. 7: *Pahlavān's* initiation ceremony, eighteenth century. Source: Abolala Soudavar, *Art of the Persian Courts* (NY, 1992), 325.

Once a young wrestler's apprenticeship has ended, he received the initiation that confirms him as a *pahlavān*, and from then on he is on his own;⁶⁰ perhaps he will go to a different city to begin a new cycle.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, an Iranian professional wrestler seems to have lived an erratic life, its stations determined by chance, opportunities, invitations, friendships, and the athlete's own temperament. It is of course not only wrestlers that led such an itinerant life,⁶¹ but in our case this life-style complements the locally rooted and immobile image one had of the traditional *zūrkhānah*.

CONCLUSION

The *zūrkhānah*, which—together with the mosque, the public bathhouse, and the teahouse—was a center of sociability in traditional neighborhoods, was much more than a closed and disreputable place, as it is so often portrayed. In the nineteenth century, acrobats, *shāṭirs*, wrestlers, and men who made a place for physical exercise in their daily routines, could conclude their daily activities by

60. Such an initiation is depicted on an eighteenth-century Mughal miniature. See Abolala Soudavar, *Art of the Persian Courts* (New York, 1992), 325.

61. Circus artists in Europe are another example. For a successful visual rendition of the lives of wandering athletes and entertainers, see the Soviet film *The Wrestler and the Clown*, whose action takes place in early twentieth century Russia.

visiting a private or public house of strength. They would then relax in a nearby *ḥammām*, before going to a teahouse in a small group for a repast.

Although the number of athletes who made a living from wrestling was small by comparison, these itinerant professionals could count on the hospitality and solidarity of others who shared their art in the towns and cities they visited. A particular *zūrkhānah*'s network of solidarity links covered vast areas, even though within a city different houses of strength often had an antagonistic relationship with each other. These ties persist even today. Locally, one can witness them in the *gulrīzān* ceremony, where funds are collected for the community of athletes or one of its members who has fallen on hard times, and nationally one can experience them in the proverbial sense of hospitality that pervades the world of the *bāstānikār* athletes. In 1995, for instance, the head of the Kerman federation of ancient sports was always ready to extend room and board to up to fifteen visiting athletes, and could count on similar hospitality whenever he and members of his close entourage visited Teheran.⁶²

Collective Iranian memory has preserved a certain Manichean image of the *zūrkhānah* as either a locus of noble chivalry or an abode of vice and thuggery. This is partly due to the fact that the extant written texts present an idealized picture of the institution and its members, a picture to which actual practice never lived up. It is therefore wrong to posit a golden age followed by a period of decadence that set in in late Qajar times. The *zūrkhānah* simply reflected the society of which it was a part, not more, not less. From royal courts to provincial bazaars, from simple muscle-building exercise to mystic quest, athletic arts were appreciated differently by different people, depending on the value one attached to the benefits they procured.

One thing is clear: the life-style that was associated with the house of strength was more often than not judged to be marginal. But one has to remember that the way these men of strength, endurance, and agility conducted their lives reflected the hardships of their daily lives. Moralists might criticize them and rich notables might use them, powerful aristocrats might find them entertaining and small bazaar merchants might fear them, but theirs was a life-style that, although marginal, had a place in society. To the best of my knowledge, the *zūrkhānah* has never been the object of a public condemnation by the authorities, unlike taverns, gambling parlors, and brothels. This means that, however disparaged it may have been, the way of life of *zūrkhānah* adepts was on the one hand not sufficiently out of the ordinary to warrant total prohibition, and on the other hand tolerated by the authorities in exchange for services rendered. This places the *zūrkhānah* in a position of "institutionalized marginality" and leads to the question as to how Iranian society managed and used "out-of-norm" conduct. The *zūrkhānah* fulfilled certain functions in Iranian society, and these went beyond simply providing a place for physical exercise.

Today the *zūrkhānah* tries to remain relevant to the society that surrounds it. It will be interesting to observe its evolution and to see whether a conception of the world that gives priority to the group rather than the individual, that has a

62. Personal observation.

well-defined and very demanding view of friendship, and that takes liberties with formal law but respects informal hierarchies, can accommodate itself to the new socio-political realities that seem to develop in Iran, while keeping its originality and specificity.

Translated and edited by H. E. Chehabi, Boston University

Nanzan University

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Author(s): Jürgen Wasim Frembgen

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JÜRGEN WASIM FREMBGEN

Völkerkundemuseum

Munich, Germany

The Scorpion in Muslim Folklore

Abstract

In the dry zone between North Africa and South Asia scorpions have caught the imagination of nomads and sedentary people in various ways. First of all, venomous scorpions have long been considered as embodiments of evil, but also as protectors to counter the powers of other evil forces. This is reflected in beliefs, in pictorial representations of oriental art from early historic periods, and in contemporary Muslim folklore. In the mystical imagery of Islam the scorpion appears as a symbol for the dervish's power of mastering evil. On another level of meaning, the scorpion is also a metaphor for sexuality. The final part of the paper deals with the meanings and uses of scorpions in local folk medicine and magic.

Keywords: scorpion—evil—Sufism—sexuality—medicine—magic

WITHIN ZOOLOGY, scorpions (order *Scorpiones*) belong within the class of arachnids—which includes tarantulas—and comprise around one thousand to one thousand five hundred species, a figure which is rather small by invertebrate standards (RANKIN and WALLS 1994, 54).^{*} They are abundant throughout the warm, humid habitats of Africa and Asia as well as in tropical America and Australia. Some characteristic desert species in North Africa and the Middle East are, for instance, the yellowish-lightbrown *Buthus occitanus* ('*aqrab*, FIGURE 1) and the black *Androctonus* ('*aqrab al-ḳahla*, *oqurban*) in Tunisia, and *Mesobuthus eupeus*, *Androctonus crassicauda*, and the *Hemiscorpius lepturus* in Khuzistan (Southwest Iran).¹ These venomous creatures cause what has been called “scorpionism,” that is, poisoning by scorpion stings and related haematoid diseases.

The body of the scorpion (between two to eight inches in length) consists of three basic parts: a cephalothorax or carapace that covers the head and the bases of the legs, a broad seven-segmented abdomen of about the same length and shape as the carapace, and a five-segmented narrow “tail” or postabdomen ending in a telson (RANKIN and WALLS 1994, 54). The latter, which is not a true segment in itself, is also called the sting. Inside the claw-like telson are two paired venom glands, which are controlled by the scorpion. The scorpion has four pairs of true legs, a pair of leg-like pedipalps, which are held out in the front and end in large pincers, and chelae, which look like the claws of a lobster or crab. Therefore, in North Africa the crab is also called “scorpion of the sea” ('*aqrab al-bahr*). The pedipalps are used to catch and hold food. Between them, at the very front of the carapace, are the chelicerae; short, heavy pincers used for the final crushing and ripping of the animal prey, which consists of all sorts of creatures, such as spiders and other scorpions (!), but also small lizards, mice, and even snakes (FIGURE 2).

Scorpions are nocturnal hunters and secretive animals; for most species the day is usually spent in shallow self-dug burrows. The burrows are highlighted in the Tunisian proverb: *la tudhil yad al-fran, la talsa' al-'aqarib*—

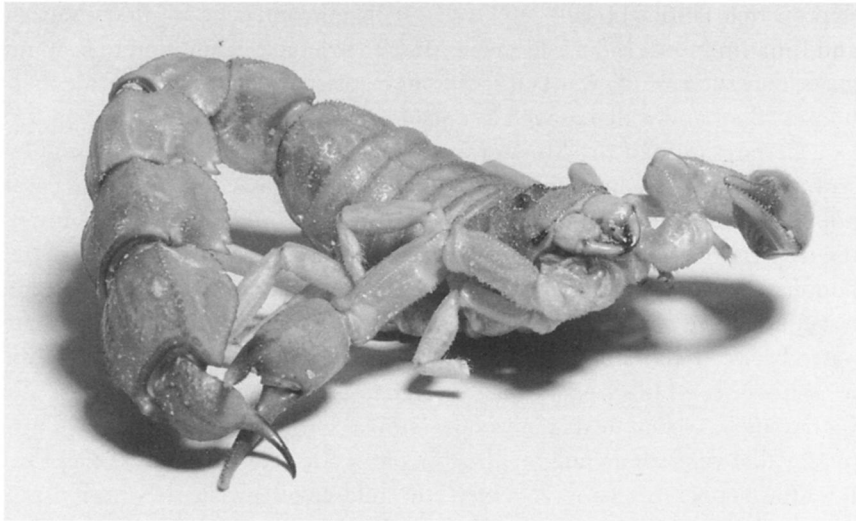
FIGURE 1: Tunisian Scorpion (*Buthus occitanus*).

Photo: M.Weidner-El Salamouny

“Don’t put your hands near mice (that is, in a mouse-hole) or you will be bitten by scorpions.” The danger of being bitten is especially high in the evenings and nights of hot summer months when arachnids are more active than in other seasons. At night, people in the rural areas of the Muslim world often go barefoot to the toilet and are then particularly exposed to the danger of scorpion bites. Generally, humans are mostly bitten on the feet and the hands, especially the fingers (GESSAIN and GILLOT 1983, 166). Scorpions are also known to crawl into shoes. This is reflected in an Afghan folk story where an eagle grabs the Prophet’s shoe with its beak, flies a distance, and lets it fall to the ground.² A scorpion comes out and in this way the eagle saves Muhammad from its bite. The fact that scorpions, unlike snakes, always come back and cannot be frightened away is expressed in an Arabic proverb from Syria: *jemb al-‘aqrab la tiqrab, jemb al-haiyyi fru u nam*—“By the side of the scorpion do not come, by the side of the snake spread your bed and sleep” (JEWETT 1891–1893, 63). People are therefore always on the lookout to keep their houses free of scorpions—the careful cleaning of the corners of houses is imperative. In the past, experts (like the North African ‘Isawi dervishes) went around the cities in the evenings, lured the animals with fire, and grabbed them with tongs. In Central Asia, people also try to protect themselves with traditional felt carpets spread on the floor, because it is said that scorpions and tarantulas would not



FIGURE 2: Scorpion on Czech stamp.

step on that fabric (HARVEY 1996, 62). Village women from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in North India told me in March 1993 that, in addition to keeping goats, they successfully ward off scorpions by plastering cow dung inside their houses (floor and walls) as well as outside on a regular basis.

Certain areas of the Muslim world seem to be particularly infested by scorpions, such as Khuzistan where approximately five percent of the rural population are stung by the venomous creatures annually; another study in the tropical Bassari region of Senegal revealed that forty-four percent of the population had been stung at least once in their lifetime.³ As reflected in the travel literature of the nineteenth century, the Iranian town of Kashan (situated between Tehran and Isfahan) was of particularly ill repute because of its abundance of black scorpions. George CURZON, for example, writes: "So venomous was their bite that one of the familiar forms of expressing hatred was to pray that your enemy might...be stung by a Kashani scorpion" (1892, 15).⁴ It is little wonder that across Iran men and children often collect a scorpion, put a circle of fire around it, and watch how the creature tries to escape in vain.⁵ The scorpion finally commits suicide and bites itself. The same has been observed in the area of Kunduz in Northern Afghanistan.⁶

SCORPIONS AS EMBODIMENTS OF EVIL

Due to its menacing appearance and dangerous poison, the scorpion has been feared since ancient times, particularly in the dry zone between North Africa and South Asia. Therefore, the Arab encyclopaedist an-Nuwairi (d. 332 CE) classified it in the zoographical part of his work as belonging to the "poisonous animals" (*dawat as-sumum*) with a deadly venom (EISENSTEIN 1991, 46, 194). In popular Muslim imagination, it is said that particularly dangerous scorpions inhabit hell. Thus, a legend mentions "a race of scorpions as big as camels with tails like steel chains, each of which contains a ton of poison, one drop of which would suffice to kill all the fishes in the ocean" (KNAPPERT 1985, 30, compare 59). An Indian variant describes scorpions living in hell having "the size of 'mules with packsaddles,' whose poison and the paroxysms they cause last forty years" (METCALF 1992, 171). Furthermore, the Prophet is said to have classified demons and spirits (*jinn*) into different groups—one of them appearing in the shape of scorpions and snakes (KRISS and KRISS-HEINRICH 1962, 15, 30; KNAPPERT 1985, 32). According to a *hadith*, Muhammad issued advice to kill the sinful (*fawasiq*) animal within the holy area (*haram*) of Mecca (EISENSTEIN 1991, 15). In the beliefs and practices of Muslim folk religion, the scorpion is generally associated with evil, but, following the concept of sympathetic magic, it is often also regarded in a positive sense as a protector to counter the powers of evil.⁷ Before studying these aspects in contemporary Muslim folklore through

presenting ethnographic material, a few examples from earlier periods will help to highlight the cultural meaning and importance of the scorpion.

In ancient oriental art, we find depictions of the scorpion as a protective emblem: a proto-Harappan ivory seal from Rehman Dheri in the Pakistani Gomali valley, dated about 3200 BC, shows two scorpions flanking a frog (DURRANI 1988, 28, 222–23). Multitudes of carved scorpions were found on chlorite stone vessels from the newly-excavated culture of Jiroft (third millennium BC) in Southeast Iran. The depictions of a mythical creature whose upper body is that of a human and lower body that of a scorpion are extraordinary (PERROT 2003, 97, 106). Similarly, in ancient Mesopotamia the famous epic of *Gilgamesh* mentions the scorpion-man and scorpion-woman (DALLEY 1989, 96–8, 327). These composite creatures act as guardians of the mountain Mashu at the edge of the world. Also, a demon called Pazuzu is said to have a tail in the shape of a scorpion's sting (CATALOGUE 1977/78, No. 152). Furthermore, according to Babylonian mythology, Tiamat, the ocean and water deity that is the embodiment of evil, sends "fearless, disgusting scorpions," together with snakes and dragons, to fight the gods (WUESSING 1994, 69). Thus, in Mesopotamian art, the scorpion is depicted as an apotropaic symbol, for instance, on a boundary stone of the fourteenth century BC alongside a cuneiform written text containing maledictions against potential trespassers (CATALOGUE 1977/78, No. 119). Likewise, the scorpion appears on the seals of that area dating back to the fourth and third millennia BC (BRENTJES 1983, 22, 33, 49, 118).

In ancient Egypt, a number of deities, particularly Isis, Hedetet, and the scorpion goddess Selkis, were invoked in order to help against scorpion bites (KEIMER 1929, 106; SCHULZ & KOLTA 1998, 100–101). Selkis, who exacts revenge for crimes, is depicted either as a scorpion with a female head or as a woman with a scorpion crowning her head. Scorpions were also occasionally painted as funerary motifs on cartonnage mummy cases. A coffin in the Cleveland Museum of Art (Inv. No. 1914.715), dated around 50 BC–50 CE, shows scorpions as protecting animals flanking the soles of the deceased's sandals.

Depictions of scorpions on Bactrian seals belonging to the Oxus civilization as well as on Afghan bronze stamps used for pottery vessels (first millennium BC) again may indicate the protective power of the dangerous creature (BRENTJES 1983, 30). A similar meaning can be assumed for small bronze sculptures of scorpions from ancient South Arabia which might have been used as votive offerings (FIGURE 3).

In the context of Near Eastern Hellenic culture, the famous evil eye mosaic from the vestibule of the "House of the Evil Eye" in Antioch, dated in the second century CE (Hatay Archaeological Museum Antakya, Inv. No. 1024),

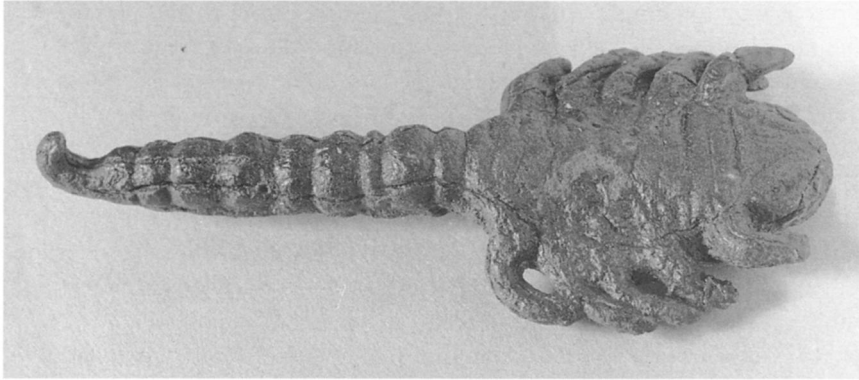


FIGURE 3: Apotropaic scorpion made of bronze (length 5–6 cm)/Ancient South Arabia.

Photo: Alexander Laurenzo

shows a scorpion—as well as a snake, centipede, barking dog, and several weapons—attacking the eye. Eventually the scorpion also appears as a conventional Mithraic symbol: together with a snake and a dog, it helps the light and sun deity slay the bull.

In Buddhist tradition, it is Mara, the opponent of the Buddha, who sends venomous animals, like scorpions and snakes, against the Enlightened One to destroy him. The motif of the scorpion appears in Tibetan religious art where guardian deities, such as the ferocious red warrior Beg-tse and the goddess lHa-mo, female protector of the Buddhist doctrine, (in her form as lHa-mo dud sol-ma, a fierce manifestation), carry a scorpion-handled sword as a distinctive attribute (HELLER). In Tibetan iconography also, the Buddhist teacher Padmasambhava, in his wrathful manifestation as Guru Drag-po, holds a big scorpion in his hand (HELLER; RHIE and THURMANN 1996, No. 185). The depictions of scorpions on various Thangka paintings relate them to the realm of the hell (CATALOGUE 1977, 214, No. 248), whereas on objects of ritual use, such as horns filled with magical ingredients, they refer again to their protective power (MÜLLER 1982, 312; HELLER).

One of the terrifying and destructive deities of the Hindu pantheon is the hag-like Vṛśīkodari, “the goddess with the scorpion on her belly” (GRANOFF 1980, 77). She is identified as Bhadrakali, a fierce emanation of Parvati, who is associated with the larger groups of the Eight Camundas and the Nine Durgas. The dancing scorpion goddess was especially popular in the medieval period where her sculpture can be found in various temples, predominantly in North India (eleventh/twelfth century). It has to be added that Shiva, in his manifestation as Aghora, is adorned with a necklace of scorpions (GRANOFF 1980, 86).

To conclude this historico-cultural overview, I refer to the example of an ethnic group living in the Hindukush: in the mythology of the Kalasha, as

among other Central Asian peoples, scorpions appear as typical “underworld creatures” whose depictions are found—together with those of snakes, frogs, and millipedes—on the pillar leading to the underworld (PARKES 1991, 85).

Turning our attention to the folklore of the Muslim world, beginning with Central Asia, we come across two proverbs in the Burushaski language spoken by the Hunzokuts and Nagerkuts in the Karakoram. The comparison “like the scorpion that eats its mother” (*junghoowe imi sim juwan*) is “used to reprimand a child who does not behave properly with his parents. It is believed in Hunza that the female scorpion dies during parturition and that this is caused by its being eaten from the inside by its youngsters” (TIFFOU 1993, 121, No. 4033). Similar sayings and narratives can be found in Iran, India, and Nepal (GÖPEL 2002, 202–203; MAJUPURIA 1991, 202–203). They obviously contradict the zoological facts, but are probably based on the observation that the young larval scorpions (commonly two or three dozen) ride on their mother’s back until their first molt about a week after birth. This might have conveyed the impression that they “eat” the adult scorpion. On the other hand, the above-mentioned belief from Hunza could also reflect the observation of the well-known cannibalistic behaviour of scorpions, although adults usually devour the young and not vice versa. The scorpion also appears as an embodiment of evil in the related Hunza proverb “like a scorpion and its children” (*junghoowe ke iskimuts juwan*), which denotes a fight within the family leading to death.⁸

Out of fear of the poisonous animal, the Uighurs in Eastern Turkestan



FIGURE 4. Fighting scorpions in Afghanistan.

(Sinkiang) avoid pronouncing its name *chayan* and, instead, refer to it obliquely as the “yellow donkey” (*sirik eshek*); in Kashgar and Turfan the people simply call it “donkey.”⁹ This is based on the belief that if they say *chayan* too often, the dangerous insect would enter the house. *Chayan* is used in vernacular Uighur as a swear word for somebody who pesters others through “biting them with his sting (*nashtar*),” thereby causing a lot of trouble.

Similarly, in Afghanistan, if somebody is up to something evil and behaves underhandedly, one says that he stings (*nish zadan*) like a scorpion or that he “has his sting in an upright position” (*dombak-e qarqara mekonad*), like an attacking scorpion.¹⁰ Another proverbial Persian saying in Afghanistan is “you are (like) a scorpion under the floor mat” (*tu ga dom-e zir-e buria hasti*), that is, the person in question first stings like a scorpion and then quietly retreats under the mat or carpet.¹¹ Therefore, in Urdu, one reprimands somebody by saying “don’t be a scorpion!” (*bichchhu na banna*). Accordingly, an Arabic curse (which I heard in Tunisia) goes “get lost, may you be stung (by a scorpion)!” (*barr irak maldugh*). Here it can be added that in Arabic-Muslim literature, scorpions also appear as embodiments of evil spirits or demons (EISENSTEIN 1991, 224; GLADISS 1999, 151).

An individual who fleeces others, for instance, a money-lender taking interest (which is prohibited in Islam), is frequently abused in Pakistan and Afghanistan as a *sudkhor*. This term means somebody who behaves like a scorpion and literally eats others’ profits.¹² The same sense is expressed in the Pashto proverb *laram da baniya lah baulo nah paida keg-i* (lit. “the scorpion is begotten of the *baniya*’s urine”) which, in a pejorative sense, means that the Hindu moneylender (*baniya*) is considered to be the vilest creature on earth (GILBERTSON 1932, vol. II, 749).

There are many examples in folklore where malicious people are compared to vicious animals. Reinhold LOEFFLER records the Shi’a folk tradition in which the hated Yazid, who ordered the killing of Imam Husain and his family in Karbala, felt a terrible pain in his stomach upon his death (1988, 43). After he died, the physicians opened his abdomen for the postmortem and two or three scorpions crawled out. This belief, which aptly shows the scorpion as an embodiment of evil, is also reflected in a story I heard in Rawalpindi (Punjab/Pakistan):

After people had completed their work of digging a grave for a deceased man, many scorpions came out of the burial pit. As a result, the Mulla ordered them to dig a second grave at a different place in the cemetery. When they put the dead body into the pit, suddenly two snakes, whose heads and ends were intertwined, crawled out of the earth;¹³ they embraced the corpse so violently that it separated into two parts. The Mulla eventually asked the deceased’s wife about

the personality of her husband and the lady confessed that she was, in fact, the sister of that man.

Another strand of folklore material deals with the acceptance that it is simply in the nature of the scorpion (and, by extension, a vile human being) to be harmful. An Urdu saying holds that "it is in the nature of the scorpion to bite" (*bichchhu ke khaslat men dang marna hai*). Similarly, the Persian proverb "the scorpion doesn't sting out of malice, it is its nature to do so" (*nish-e 'aqrab na az rah-e kin ast, tabiyyat-ash in ast*) is used in everyday situations if one feels hurt by somebody else.¹⁴ A parable from South Asia tells of a scorpion who asks a frog to carry him across the river. In return for that service, the scorpion promises not to bite. Nevertheless, during the journey, it bites the frog and both begin to drown. Facing death, in a last word the scorpion apologizes to its victim saying: "I could not act in another way, I am just like that" (RUSHDIE 1996, 230). In a tale about the Arabian prophet Salih, it is mentioned that the king of Thamud was punished by God for destroying a mosque in such a way that the leaves of the nearby date tree turned into scorpions while the dates became snakes who both attacked the king's men, biting and stinging them (KNAPPERT 1985, 68).

DERVISHES AND SCORPIONS

A well-known motif of Indian wisdom deals with the sage who crosses a river (that is, "the water of worldly reality") and reaches the other side (that is, he overcomes worldliness), thereby attaining spiritual perfection. A North Indian folk tale, for instance, mentions a Hindu saint who was bitten several times by scorpions while crossing a river. When he reached the river bank, the people asked him why he allowed himself to be bitten and why he did not shake them off. The sage replied that it would be the *dharma* (religious obligation, order) of the scorpions to bite and that these animals would just follow their path. He would not have the right to change that or to kill the scorpions.¹⁵ Such legends are not only embedded in the Hindu context, but have long since been attributed to Muslim mystics. Thus, a variant of that story was told to me in Vehari (Southern Punjab) by Rao Saghir Ahmad, who narrated that a Muslim saint was once sitting at a river bank when he was stung by a scorpion. Asked why he did not kill the poisonous insect, he replied: "It is the nature of the scorpion to bite, it is my nature not to do any evil and not to kill." It goes without saying that the saint and the sage remained unhurt. It is said of the early Sufi Sari as-Saqati (d. 865 or later) that while teaching on the subject of *sabr* (patience), he did nothing to ward off a scorpion and allowed himself to be stung by it (GRAMLICH 1976, 85).¹⁶

While this story and its variants emphasize the ideals of following either

the *dharma* or fulfilling the notion of *sabr* resulting in non-action on the part of the holy men, there are somewhat different notions in vernacular Islam. In the case of a female Uwaysi Sufi, Funduqa of Baghdad, for instance, a scorpion appears as a mysterious and powerful guide. The legend holds: "One day a scorpion passed in front of her in an agitated manner. She followed it, and they came to a river. The scorpion stopped, confused. A fish appeared, took it on its back, brought it across and went away. Funduqa crossed the river and followed the scorpion. It came to a tree.... Beneath the tree a woman had fallen asleep, and a snake was about to kill her. The scorpion killed the snake and went back" (BALDICK 1993, 184).

Other sources emphasize that all creatures, even the most dangerous

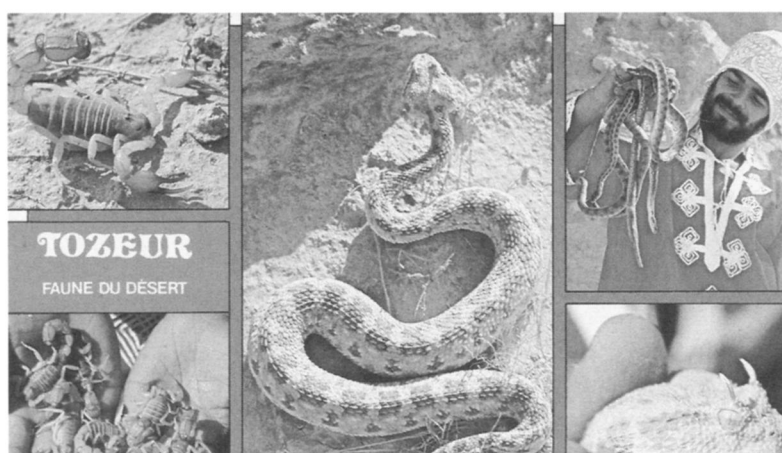


FIGURE 5. Tunisian 'Isawi dervish handling snakes and scorpions (postcard).

ones such as snakes and scorpions, are obedient to God and become tame and peaceful in the presence of saints. In particular, the charismatic and enraptured *majzub*, a Muslim ecstatic who embodies "otherness," has a reputation of being able to touch any wild and venomous animal without being harmed. Similarly, it is said that also the holy fools of Oriental Christianity were immune to any danger and could step on snakes and scorpions (BENZ 1938, 41, 53). Within popular Sufism, dervishes especially are imbued with magical powers, such as those belonging to the Rifa'iyya, Sa'diyya, 'Isawiyya (Aissaoua), and Jalali, and they have the capacity to handle scorpions. It is reported that in Egypt the Rifa'i and the related Sa'di, in a state of trance, took venomous scorpions and snakes into their mouth and partly devoured them (LANE 1914, 241, 460; FREMBGEN 2000, 96, 113–15). The Gurzmar fakirs, who represent the Indian offshoot of the Rifa'iyya, are also known to do this.

Furthermore, in Iran there are peripatetic entertainers who apparently let themselves be stung by scorpions (as observed in the 1960s in Kashan).¹⁷ It is thought by locals that the use of opium provides some sort of immunity against scorpion bites. Throughout North Africa the 'Isawi dervishes make a living as peripatetic or partly sedentary snake charmers (FIGURE 5). During their performances, they also take scorpions into their mouth. In addition to their activity as entertainers, they catch scorpions and work as healers. WESTERMARCK reports from the Moroccan city of Fez, "when a person has been bitten by a scorpion, he ties up the part of the body which has been bitten, so as to prevent the poison from spreading, and then an 'Esáwi sucks the blood from the wound and spits it out. But the 'Esáwi first puts salt into his mouth—not as a protection against the poison, which he is proof against, but on account of the blood" (1926, 303). In Bir Lahmar (near Medenine) in South Tunisia, a villager told me in May 1997 that they utter magical formulas while applying a ligature, pressing out the wound, and sucking out the poison (compare NARBESHUBER 1904, 17). In Afghanistan, M. H. Sidky observed the healing of a scorpion sting by an old *malang* (wandering dervish). He describes in detail: "After examining the sting, the *malang* sat down on the floor in front of the young man. He produced a knife and an old safety razor from the pouch strung around his shoulders underneath his robe, placing them on the floor in front of him. Picking up the knife and feeling its edge with his thumb, he placed the blade against his patient's skin, about twelve centimetres above the sting. Pressing the blade so as to indent but not break the skin, with a downward motion, he began to stroke the afflicted leg. As he manipulated the knife, the *malang* recited magical formulae and, at the end of each one, blew on the afflicted spot. This treatment, which lasted about five minutes, was said to neutralize the venom. Finally, using his safety razor, the *malang* made a small incision just below the sting and caught the resultant flow of dark-colored blood in a ceramic cup. After allowing the wound to bleed for about a minute, the *malang* applied a wad of moist tobacco to it, then bound it with a piece of cloth. Tobacco, the healer told me, draws out all kinds of *zahr*, or toxins" (SIDKY, 1990, 291–92). The basis of such healing practices by dervishes and performances by "holy travelling entertainers" demonstrating anaesthesia, is the mystical *jihad* (lit. struggle for the sake of God) against the *nafs*—the lower, vital self, which has to be educated with the help of various ascetic practices (FREMBGEN 2000, 179–87). Nevertheless, unlike the saint, these peripatetics primarily occupy an economic niche and handle scorpions for monetary reasons.

THE SCORPION AS A METAPHOR FOR SEXUALITY

Thus far, we discussed the scorpion as a general embodiment of evil—associated with malice and death—as well as its importance in Sufi imagery as a symbol for the mystic’s power of mastering the evil. A third level of meaning refers to morality and unfolds in the language of physical love. In the popular culture of Indo-Pakistan, for instance, the scorpion is used as a metaphor of pain, carnal desire, and lust—and, in a more concrete way, of coitus itself (thereby invoking the experience of orgasm as a sort of “half-death” or “little-death”). In this context the scorpion’s sting (Urdu/Punjabi *dank*, Pashto *lasha*) serves as a paraphrase for the erect male penis.

The metaphorical sense of the words used for a scorpion (Urdu *bichchhu*, Punjabi *thuan*, Siraiki *withuan*, Sindhi *wichchha*, Pashto *laram*) is often indicated in a more or less veiled form in folk and film songs dealing with love. In an old Urdu song performed by Rona Laila, the expression *dasgaye bichchhuan* refers to the heroine who is under love’s spell and feels as if she has been stung by a scorpion. A Pashto song starts with the line *laram da laram*, indicating the woman’s lover, who treats her like a scorpion. Vulgar Pashto films make ample use of the sexual imagery: paraphrasing the hero as a scorpion means that he acts in a cruel way and that he is “hot” and “horny.” In this sense a girl sings in another Pashto folk song: *wa more da radou ka, laram kharale-yam*—“O mother come, the scorpion has bitten me!” Erotic songs performed by the *duma* (dancing girl and prostitute in the North-West Frontier Province) frequently contain this arousing metaphor.

The sexual imagery of scorpion bites is widespread on the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent. In the course of the *rai* dance of the Gond in Bundelkhand (Central India), for instance, the girl sings that she is going to die because a scorpion (that is, her lover) has bitten her. A protective significance can be more likely assumed in the case of scorpions depicted on a number of sculptures showing celestial nymphs (*surasundari*) at medieval Hindu temples in Khajuraho. There the insect is placed on the thighs of the female body. Similarly, the scorpion is embroidered as a design with a symbolic meaning on contemporary Gujarati women’s skirts (*ghaghro*). Referring to Parmar, Emma TARLO explains, “the scorpion motif, which also appears in tattoos, is a sex symbol that was in the past commonly found at the top of the *vadkyu* [embroidered end-flap; author’s note] of the *ghaghro*, at the top of the woman’s thigh. These scorpions were not, it seems, merely decorative. They were potentially malevolent to anyone who should usurp a woman’s *ghaghro* and, by implication, her husband’s bed. Parmar recalls...a song which runs:

Manibai is having her bath, my beloved
The scorpion has climbed her *ghaghros*,
It climbed up and bit her, beloved.

Here the scorpion in the song bit a woman's husband's lover. According to Parmar, dying women would often say: 'If my *ghaghros* are worn by my husband's second wife, she will be bitten by a scorpion.' Here the scorpion seems to be at once decorative, protective (of the wife's rights), malevolent (towards the imposter) and phallic" (TARLO 1996, 228). As far as the last mentioned aspect is concerned, it can be added that in Bundelkhand a "horny" wife who does not get sexual satisfaction from her husband is called in the vernacular a *dankini* (scorpion's bite), that is, somebody who yearns for

نام دوا	خصوص	پیکنگ	قیمت
اکسیر غار ش قیل	پرانے سے پرانی غارش کیلئے مفید ہے۔ پھوڑے پھنسی کا خاتمہ کرتا ہے۔	فی شیشی	۲۰۰ روپے
شاہی طلا	مشہور و معروف طلایہ ہے۔ عضو مخصوص کی جلد امراض کیلئے بے حد مفید ہے۔ بھی لاغری کو دور کرتا ہے۔	۱۰ گرام	۲۰۰ روپے
روغن آملہ	بالوں کی جلد امراض کا زود اثر علاج ہے۔ گتے بالوں کو روکتا ہے۔ بالوں کو گھٹنا چمکدار بناتا ہے۔ خشکی سکری کا خاتمہ کرتا ہے۔	فی شیشی	۳۰۰ روپے
روغن خاص	شیر و بچھا اور دیگر جانوروں کی چربیوں اور مٹی بونٹیوں سے تیار کردہ روغن خاص پولبو، فالج اور بھائی دردوں کیلئے مفید ہے۔	فی شیشی	۱۵۰ روپے
مرہم بواسیر	پرانے سے پرانی بواسیر کیلئے مفید ہے۔ جان اور سوزش کو دور کرتا ہے۔	۲۰ گرام	۲۰۰ روپے
شاہی بام	سر درد، نزلہ، زکام، قلو، سینے کی بکڑ، جھانسی دردوں کیلئے مفید ہے۔ جلد میں خوری جذب ہو کر ناک اور دماغ کو کھولتی ہے۔	۲۰ گرام	۱۰۰ روپے
ملذذ خاص	اس کے استعمال سے طریق میں لذت پیدا ہوتی ہے۔ سہرت کے لمحات کو پرمسرت بناتی ہے۔ خوشبودار ہے۔ بڑی استعمال کی دوا	۵ گرام	۴۵۰ روپے
حب بواسیر	خونی و بادی بواسیر کیلئے مجرب دوا ہے۔ خون کو بند کرتا ہے۔ قبض کشا ہے۔	۲۵ گولی	۲۰۰ روپے
روغن چرائ غنیمہ	آنکھوں کی امراض کیلئے مفید ہے۔ بینائی کو طاقت دیتا ہے۔	فی شیشی	۱۰۰ روپے
حب امساک	وقت ضرورت کی خاص دوا ہے۔ امساک پیدا کرتا ہے۔ مفر صحت اجزاء سے پاک ہے۔	ایک گولی	۵۰ روپے
لبوب کبیر جواہر دار	اعلیٰ درجہ کی مقوی باہ معجون ہے۔ اعصابی و جسمانی کمزوری کو دور کرتی ہے۔	۵۰ گرام	۸۰ روپے
خمیرہ گاوزبان	دل و دماغ کو طاقت دیتا ہے۔ بینائی کو تیز کرتا ہے۔	۵۰ گرام	۲۵ روپے

FIGURE 6. Advertising scorpion medicine on a leaflet from Lahore.

(in other words, wants to kill) a lover. Similarly in Rajasthan, a sexually obsessed woman is called *bichchhuri rand* or *dakan rand* in a pejorative way, thereby pointing to the observation that the female scorpion frequently kills the male after copulation. Finally, also the scorpion motif frequently appearing on Moroccan women's textiles are interpreted as being "associated with fertility and having prophylactic functions against adultery" (JEREB 1995, 47).

By the way, comparable erotic elements can be found in Southern Italian and Sardinian tarantism (since the fifteenth century): the bite of the tarantula spider is used as an oblique reference in the language of physical love, hence the invocation to the patron-saint "my St Paul of the Tarantists who pricks the girls in their vaginas" (LEWIS 1989, 81).

It can be added that Pashto wit and mockery focuses on the peculiar anatomy of the scorpion, which stings forward although the sting protudes from its back. Thus, after an actual scorpion bite, the victim could be asked jokingly "did the scorpion sting from the front or from the back?" In the realm of sexuality, such imagery either refers to male-female or to male-male sexual relations. It is therefore a very serious insult among men to say "you have been bitten by a scorpion from the back!" (meaning "you have been used as a passive sexual partner").

FOLK MEDICINE AND MAGIC

Scorpions used in the Preparation of Folk Remedies

Taking the above-mentioned sexual metaphors into account, it is small wonder that oil extracted from the sting of the scorpion is widely used in South Asia by Jogi-type medical practitioners to prepare a remedy (*dawa*) for restoring or increasing virility. The Jogi puts a number of living scorpions into a clay pot, closes it well, and heats the vessel for a certain time; the residues of the insects are then used for the preparation of a number of different folk remedies. Hakim Hajji Malik Fida Husain, for example, a healer practicing in Lahore, recommends scorpion medicine on an advertising leaflet against a number of ailments, such as weakness of muscles, general physical weakness, difficulties in urinating, and so on (FIGURE 6).

On 1 November 1996, I had the chance to observe the advertising performance of such a practitioner in Peshawar's busy Saddar bazaar whereby the Jogi extolled the potency of his products in the manner of an experienced actor (FIGURE 7). He manufactured and sold a massage oil for men, which was meant to be applied to the breast, back, arms, and legs in order to restore vitality. Furthermore, he advised to apply it to the glans of the penis and expressively pointed to the power of the erect scorpion sting. The oil consisted of nine egg yolks and other ingredients (such as wild rue, garlic,

cloves, musk, saffron, dried mushrooms, oil of alligators, oil of scorpion sting, and so on). The whole concoction was heated in a pan and then the oil was extracted. During this sort of “medicine show,” the Jogi let scorpions run over his hands (the sharp point of their stings had been scraped off) in order to impress the audience. The scorpion oil manufactured in this way is considered to be “hot” (*garm*), according to the concept of *yunani* folk medicine, which is derived from classic Galenic medicine.

In Kabul (Afghanistan), Karim-e Mar-gir was a famous Tajik medical practitioner (he died in the 1960s from snake bite)

who specialized in preparing and selling a variety of remedies made from the ingredients of snakes and scorpions.¹⁸ He was particularly known for his ability to cure skin diseases and jaundice. Scorpion medicine is also mentioned in a popular book called *Kitab ul-mufardat*, which was written in Urdu by Hakim Muzafar Husain Awan (it was first published in the 1950s). The author re-commends that the remedy obtained from the black scorpion whose venom is stronger and therefore more useful than that of the more feeble pale yellow variety (MUZAFAR HUSAIN AWAN 1995, 116). He advises readers to use the ash as well as the extracted oil of the insect to cure paralysis and to destroy kidney stones and urinary calculus. A local healer in the Walled City of Lahore also sold a special *tez dawa* (“hot medicine”) against kidney stones consisting of scorpion oil, radish, and *sang-e yahud* (a mixed substance shaped into a pill). Hakim Muzafar Husain Awan furthermore mentions a marzipan-like medicine called *ma’jun-e ‘aqrab*, which consists of a mixture of different ingredients. Of course, such contemporary treatises have much earlier classical antecedents written in Arabic. IBN AL-BAITAR, for instance, recommended using the ash of the scorpion to strengthen the eyesight and to break up kidney stones, whereas it is said that scorpions dissolved in boiling olive oil would help to heal ulcers, to ease pains in the back and in the hips, and to increase the growth of hair (1840, vol. II, 201–202). Another medieval scholar, Mohammad ibn-Zakariyya ar-Razi (865–923),



FIGURE 7. Jogi selling scorpion medicine in Peshawar (Pakistan).

notes, “if one eats a scorpion, it will break up the stones in the bladder” and in case of scorpion bite (the subject of the following section) “if you squash a scorpion and lay it on the wound, this will help considerably” (ULLMANN 1997, 109).

Antidotes for Scorpion Bites

Ancient and medieval Arabic books about stones mention malachite (*hagar ad-dahnag*) as a suitable substance to be pressed on the wound after somebody has been stung by a scorpion (EISENSTEIN 1991, 89). Similarly, in Egyptian folk medicine, a magical “stone” called *fass al-‘aqrab* was used until recently (WINKLER 1936, 339). It consisted, in fact, of the closing top of a sea snail revealing a spiral design, which (following the sympathetic concepts of magic) is explained as the tail of a scorpion.

Ibn al-Jazzar, a physician who practiced in the tenth century in the North African (now Tunisian) town of Kairouan, recommended in his treatise *Tibb al-fuqara’ wa’l-masakin* (“Medicine for the poor and destitute”) several magic recipes, namely “taking the dried dung of a donkey who grazes on grass, mixed with wine; or hanging on the person who has been stung the root of an olive tree; or killing a black beetle and placing it on the site of the sting” (BOS 1998, 372–73). The Andalusian Ibn al-Baitar referred to *zanab al-‘aqrab* (*Scorpiurum sulcatum*), a plant whose leaves and seeds resemble the tail of a scorpion (IBN AL-BAITAR 1840, vol. I, 473). Following the ideas of sympathetic magic, a compress made of these seeds is supposed to heal scorpion bites. He also advised cutting a gecko into pieces and placing it on the wound in order to ease the pain (IBN AL-BAITAR 1840, vol. II, 3). More recently, a number of different *materia medica* are used by people between the *maghrib* and the *mashriq* (that is, the West and the East of the Muslim world) to extract the venom. In Southern Tunisia, I was told that after the incision, the wound should be pressed into the flesh of a freshly slaughtered chicken—a practice which is supposed to extract the poison. Another local method consists of applying the powdered horn of a rhino or the fat of a Waran lizard (NARBESHUBER 1904, 17). Similarly, peasants in the oases of the Sahara use the flesh of a Waran (NEUMANN 1983, 195), whereas villagers in Western Egypt cure scorpion bites by first dripping lemon juice into the incised wound before cauterising it (BLISS 1984, 55). In Yemen, people use *dahan al-balasan* (Arabian balsam), that is, the resin of *Commiphora opobalsamum*, and, particularly in Wadi Rima’ (Tihama), also the pulverized roots of *wazer* (*Achyranthes aspera* L.) (SCHOPEN 1983, 58–59, 194). Henri MASSÉ reports from Iran that “les gens de Kachan appliquent sur la piqûre une pièce (de monnaie) de cuivre; ...après y avoir laissé cette pièce vingt-quatre heures, ils mettent sur la place un emplâtre fait de miel et de vinaigre” (1938, 346;

compare CURZON 1892, 15). Alternatively, they bathe the wound with myrtle water or apply lettuce. Generally, in Iran insect bites are treated through an incision of the wound and the application of yoghurt. Furthermore, Persian pharmacopoeia lists natural bitumen (*momiya'i*) as an antidote to scorpion bites and other poisoning (FREMBGEN 1999, 26). In Pakistan, the reader of the *Kitab ul-mufardat* is advised first to eat radish and then to apply a paste made of refined *naushadir* (ammonium chlorite) (MUZAFAR HUSAIN AWAN 1995, 116). Another folk medicine is recommended in the Punjab, namely, putting earwax or a dead fly on the scorpion (or wasp) stings. People in the Mewar area of Southern Rajasthan treat the wound either with a piece of iron or with salt. In Mithila, a region in Northern Bihar, *haldi* powder (turmeric) is used. An Ayurvedic antidote to scorpion bites consists of bathing the wound several times with hot water and then applying a compress made of potash and sulphur.

Effective antidotes for scorpion bites made from dead scorpions are mentioned in medieval Arabic treatises on pharmacology (EISENSTEIN 1991, 102–103; GLADISS 1999, 150). Following the concept of sympathetic magic, it is interesting to discover that a special remedy was also prepared from mice, mentioned as the traditional enemies of scorpions in Arabic literature (EISENSTEIN 1991, 40, 104). But all over the Muslim world, from South Asia to North Africa, the most common antidote is an oil which is, so to speak, pickled with scorpions, or an oil of the scorpion itself, which is extracted by frying the creature. In the Punjab, one uses mustard oil or another bitter oil; in the Near East olive oil is mixed with the scorpion “juice” (WHITE 1851, 305–306). Often the Jogi or Kalbéla (in Rajasthan) who prepare this folk medicine mix additional ingredients (animal substances and herbs) to the scorpion oil, which is applied to the wound after incision. In Afghanistan as well as in Eastern Turkestan, I found that peasants collect a number of scorpions, put them in glass bottles alive, and expose them to the sun. They kill and devour each other and only the strongest one survives for a certain time until he dies from the heat. In this way, the scorpions dissolve into an oily substance, which is used as a serum.¹⁹ People in the high mountain areas of Hunza and Nager in the Karakoram cure the bite of the local small yellow-greenish scorpions (which constitute a less poisonous species) by applying *gashuqe masha maltash*, that is, a mixture of onions and fresh butter. In North Africa, the Moroccan ‘Isawi (Aissaoua) dervishes are said to “treat the bites of scorpions by making an incision in the place that was bitten and sucking it, and then applying to the wound a paste made with the scorpion that gave the bite” (LEGEY 1935, 202).

Scorpion amulets

In addition to the healing practices of dervishes and the use of folk remedies and antidotes, people try to ward off scorpions and malevolent demons, who take on the shape of these insects, by various magical means. Before focusing on the use of particular scorpion amulets in the Muslim world, it should be mentioned that since earliest times, for instance in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, the utterance of magical formulas was considered to be an effective treatment for scorpion bites. In contemporary North Africa, the patient is advised to write the following words on a piece of paper, dissolve them in water, and lick them up together with honey or oil: “Belqim, Faliaqid’mam; Dieu est bon, c’est le plus miséricordieux des miséricordieux; o poison, o douleurs, partez, retournez d’où vous êtes sortis; soyez comme le feu à Abraham, fraîcheur et salut. Il n’y a de force et de puissance qu’en Dieu” (DOUTTÉ 1909, 237). Muslim magicians and diviners (such as the *aahmil*) in the Punjab, in Baluchistan, and so on, recite the four *qul suras* of the Qur’an (that is, *suras* 109, 112–14) and blow (*dam lena*) on the wound. By comparison, in the context of Hindu folk religion, scorpion and snake bite are often treated by the recitation of mantras, for instance uttered by the Bhopa-priest in Rajasthan or the Ojha-medium in Bihar. A special *bichchhu ka mantra* consists of counting from one hundred back to one and repeating this one hundred and eight times. An informant from North India qualified this by saying that this would only work on the Holi and Diwali festival days as well as during solar and lunar eclipses.

Among the amulets supposedly protecting the wearer against scorpion bites, there are firstly those containing a written text from the Qur’an, such as, for instance, verse fifty-eight from *sura ya-sin* (the thirty-sixth *sura*) of the Holy Book in Iran (DONALDSON 1937, 260). Secondly, there are those with particular magical ingredients: For example, in Algeria, the hair of a small child, which has to be cut at the age of four months and ten days (VILLOT 1888, 216), the head of a Waran in the oases of the Sahara (NEUMANN 1983, 195), and finally amulets which, in a purely sympathetic way, show the shape of a scorpion (EISENSTEIN 1991, 222). The latter can also be part of written amulets with more extensive texts (KRISS and KRISS-HEINRICH 1962, 112). As far as the style of the depictions is concerned, many resemble those of illustrated manuscripts of the zodiac where “scorpio” is depicted besides the other zodiacs. Until recently, in Egypt, people used scorpion-shaped amulets made of bead work; the smaller ones were worn as personal amulets on the body, whereas the larger ones were hung above the entrance of private houses, shops, and so on (SCHIENERL 1983, 16; 1984, 89–100). SCHIENERL notes: “Bead-work scorpions were used for two different reasons; firstly, to ward off

scorpions and secondly, to avert the dangers emanating from the much-dreaded 'Evil Eye.' Two different ideas, with no connection to each other, form the basis for these superstitious practices. One idea, which may be traced back to pharaonic times, may have caused the emergence of scorpion goddesses. The other notion that scorpions offered protection against the 'Evil Eye,' is rooted in more recent magical beliefs that were current during the Roman period" (1983, 16). Furthermore, there are Egyptian stone amulets as well as early Islamic amulets written on paper, both with depictions of scorpions (SCHIENERL 1983, 18; GLADISS 1999, 159). A Coptic-Arabic



FIGURE 8. Nigerian amulet with Arabic script and the depiction of a scorpion.

protective formula, written on a piece of paper, shows the stylized depiction of a large scorpion in the center (SCHULZ and KOLTA 1998). The amulet was actually used in 1932 to protect a woman from scorpion bites. A similar picture is found on an earlier Coptic amulet, dating from the tenth or eleventh century, which was written on papyrus (SCHULZ and KOLTA 1998, 103). Likewise, a scorpion is depicted in a very stylized form (FIGURE 8) in an Arabic treatise on magic dealing specifically with the use of an amulet called *Musa*.²⁰ Written in 314 Hijri (926 CE) by al-Hajj Mohammad al-Ta'im in Kanu (Nigeria), it represents an early example of the well-known genre of books about charms and talismans. The practical use of an Anatolian amulet from Kastamonu showing a scorpion, a snake, and Arabic words drawn on a piece of paper is explained in the context of marriage: it

serves to protect the newly married couple from any sort of evil magic, such as that causing infertility or other bad luck. In Turkey, experts printed amulets with the help of a particular type of bronze stamp seals (eighteenth/nineteenth centuries) of a round shape depicting two stylized scorpions facing each other as well as magical inscriptions.

Islamic Healing Bowls

Arabic medicinal or magical bowls (*tasa*), made of brass mostly in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, were widely used in the Muslim medieval period; they have engravings showing various pictorial motifs and inscriptions which promise healing (*shifa*).²¹ Patients had to drink water (or sometimes also milk or oil) out of these hemispherical bowls, which were usually left overnight in order to fully absorb the powers of the magical symbols. In certain parts of

the Muslim world, people still use similar specimens. Almut von GLADISS emphasizes that the inscribed texts show a total indifference towards the scientific medicine of Islam and promise the healing of diseases and particularly the fight against poisoning solely through the power of the belief in God (1999, 149). The inscriptions of all the healing bowls first mention scorpion stings and snake bite; often these animals are also depicted on the bowl in a stylized form. According to the sympathetic concept *similia similibus evocantur*, the magical power of the scorpion picture was supposed to heal scorpion stings and also prevent the user of the bowl from being bitten. It is interesting that one bowl, dated 570 Hijri, which was thought to help against all sorts of diseases and bad luck (including scorpion stings), says at the very beginning of the inscription that “it was prepared and carved while the moon was in the scorpion” (SPOER 1935, 255), thereby referring to the “scorpio” (*al-‘aqrab*), a magically powerful sign of the zodiac (compare CARBONI 1997, 38–39).

Warding off Scorpions

There are a number of magical means and practices to ward off scorpions which do not make use of pictorial or symbolic representations. In Iran, for instance, the *basmala* (that is, the Qur’anic formula, “in the name of Allah, the merciful, the compassionate”) is uttered three times in this regard; in comparison, in Lahore, a local healer advised to recite the *basmala* twenty-one times and then blow on the wound. Another symbolic action held to be efficacious in Iran is to keep a hazel nut and some almonds on the body in order to protect it from scorpion bites (MASSÉ 1938, 202; ATKINSON 1832, 79). In Afghanistan, “bricks from the shrine of Khwaja Musesafer, ‘the Holy Traveller,’ on the roadside between Kabul and Paghman, are famous throughout the country for their ability magically to repel the scorpions which infest most Afghan homes. These bricks are collected by the shrine keeper, who, for a fee, blesses them and gives them to the pilgrims. The latter, on reaching home, grind the bricks into powder, sprinkling a little over each room, or else sewing some into tiny cloth bags, to be placed on shelves” (SIDKY 1990, 288). It has to be added that holy earth from the shrine is also rubbed on scorpion wounds (EINZMANN 1977, 223). On the subcontinent, the great Muslim saint Mu’in ud-Din Chishti (d. 1236), who is buried in Ajmer (Rajasthan), is considered to be a protector from snake bites and scorpion stings (CURRIE 1989, 109). Throughout North Africa the people believe that the hoopoe successfully attacks scorpions (and snakes). Therefore, in Tunisia, the preserved head of the bird is fixed to the wall to ward off the creatures (VENZLAFF 1994, 46, 72). Tunisians sometimes also use the dried



FIGURE 9. Tattooer's signboard in Lahore.

and powdered meat of the hoopoe as an antidote against scorpion bites (VENZLAFF 1994, 38, 46).

Scorpions as Apotropaic Symbols

Within the material culture of the Muslim world, one frequently comes across stylized symbolic representations of scorpions—especially on textiles—which serve as objectified magical means to ward off the evil (“evil eye,” scorpion bite, evil spirits appearing in the form of scorpions). Thus, the scorpion appears as an important apotropaic animal, like the snake, lizard, and centipede. A few examples should suffice to emphasize this protective power.

The scorpion motif found on Moroccan women’s garments is supposed to protect the wearer not only from actual scorpion bites, but also from sexual transgressions (JEREB 1995, 38, 47; KOROLNIK-ANDERSCH and KOROLNIK 2002, 123, 126–27). In Southern Morocco, the scorpion is depicted on the doors of buildings as well as in the jewellery of the Berbers (PHILIPPS 1995, 569). A number of tribes belonging to this ethnic group, which is settled in the Middle Atlas, also call a specific carpet design *tigherden* (“scorpion”) (RESWICK 1985, 143; CATALOGUE 1989, No. 13). On traditional Tunisian textiles, such as knotted carpets, flatwoven rugs, and embroideries for garments, one can find stylized protective scorpion motifs; often motifs are simply interpreted as depicting the scorpion’s bite (RESWICK 1985, 94, 99, plates 6, 10, 14; DOLZ 1999, 45). A particular object “full of magic” is an earthenware dish from the Berber tribe of the Ait Melloul in Morocco (which is kept in the Museum of Ethnology, Rotterdam) showing the painted depictions of a red hand, two eyes,

and two black scorpions (WILLEMSSEN 1993, 132, 134). Occasionally, the scorpion also appears in a more natural form in the context of popular *haji* paintings on the façades of Egyptian houses. In Nubia, embroidered pieces of cloth depicting scorpions are supposed to protect the house from being entered by real scorpions as well as by scorpion-shaped demons (SCHIENERL 1984, 101–102). Similarly, women paint protective scorpions on the façades of their homes. In Palestinian embroidery, one of the patterns is called ‘*aqareb*’ (“scorpion”) (EL KHALIDI 1999, App. III, 133). On Near and Middle Eastern carpets, although the

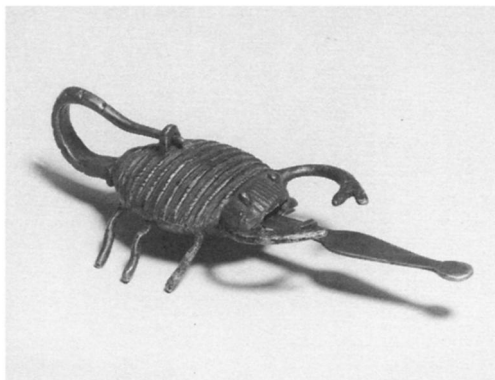


FIGURE 10. Scorpion-shaped lock from Jodhpur (Rajasthan/India). Photo: M. Weidner-El Salamouny

motif seems to be quite rare, I once saw a unique piece, a small-sized Kirşehir from Western Anatolia (nineteenth century), exhibited by a dealer in Munich, which showed a central apotropaic depiction of a scorpion against a blue, likewise apotropaic, background. By the way, in rural Iran, the scorpion is, together with the lizard, depicted as a female tattoo pattern incised by the midwife of the village. Tattooers in Lahore have the depiction of a scorpion on their signboards (FIGURE 9). Furthermore, the motif of the scorpion is found on Central Asian textiles, for instance on *ikat* weavings from Ferghana, on *suzani* embroideries, and often on the embroideries of the Lakai Uzbeks and Yömut Turkmens.²² Several scorpion motifs also protect the wearers of embroidered silk belts, such as those traditionally used by Rajput men in the Southern Pakistani province of Sindh.²³ They also appear on particular women's garments from Cholistan and Southern Punjab which are decorated with silver foil. Finally, in India, symbolic representations of scorpions can be found, for example, on bronze vessels for rice in Bihar (CATALOGUE 1984, 76, 122). More fancy objects are the contemporary locks in the shape of scorpions made particularly by craftsmen in Jodhpur (Rajasthan), an area infested with dangerous black scorpions as big as the palm of the hand (FIGURE 10).

CONCLUSION

Among the animals commonly considered to be ugly, dangerous, vicious, but also powerful and often ambivalent, such as the hyena, bat, gecko, snake, and other reptiles as well as insects, it is the scorpion that has in many ways

caught the popular imagination of people in the Muslim world. Because of its poison and its menacing appearance with a hooked sting and large claw-like pincers, the scorpion has been feared from earliest times until now. In folk Islam, it is associated with the hell and seen as an embodiment of demons and evil spirits. But, following the concept of sympathetic magic, this "underworld creature" is also regarded as a powerful guardian and protector to counter other evil forces. In this positive sense, the scorpion variously appears as an apotropaic symbol on ancient and modern pictorial representations, on bronze seals, as well as in contemporary embroideries. The dangerous and terrifying aspects of the animal are particularly emphasized in proverbs, sayings, and folk tales between North Africa and South Asia. This popular imagery has been transformed in didactic stories about Islamic mystics, whereby the scorpion is taken as a symbol for the holy man's power to master evil and for his immunity to danger. Consequently, in lived practice, the dervish became a specialized healer of scorpion bites. The peculiar anatomy of the scorpion with his hooked sting has inspired the language of physical love. In related proverbs, sayings, and songs, the scorpion represents a metaphor of pain and carnal desire. Due to this sexual imagery, oil extracted from the scorpion's sting is especially used as a remedy for restoring or increasing virility. But, apart from that, the scorpion plays its most conspicuous role in the field of folk medicine and magic. People are always eager to find antidotes against its painful and venomous bite. Moreover, they try to ward off scorpions using special amulets and by many other magical means and practices. The present paper's kaleidoscopic view on the folklore of the scorpion in the Muslim world shows how this animal has inspired human imagery in dealing with evil and in expressing experiences of danger, pain, and desire.

NOTES

*The bibliographical material for this article has been compiled over a period of about twelve years; it is supplemented by data collected during various field trips to Tunisia, Pakistan, and India as well as by information provided by a number of Muslim friends and acquaintances.

I would like to thank Dr. Norbert Herrmann (Moosburg) for the photograph of the two fighting scorpions from Afghanistan (FIGURE 4). The other photographs were taken by my friend Alexander Laurenzo (Museum of Ethnology, Munich) and myself.

1. For further information see the website www.arachnodata.ch/projekte.htm (accessed December 2000).

2. Personal communication by Mrs. Massuma Salah (Kabul).

3. www.arachnodata.ch/projekte.htm (accessed December 2000); GESSAIN and GILLOT 1983, 166.

4. Compare MASSÉ 1938, 203; ADAMEC 1976, 320 (Kashan). A few years ago, it was reported (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 12 October 2000, p. 16) that, in the town of Taiz in Southern Yemen, a twenty-year old bride was killed in a particular gruesome way, out of rivalry and jealousy, by the second wife of her husband. With the help of a barber, the older woman carefully placed a living, deadly scorpion inside the wedding wig of the young bride. According to local newspaper reports, the girl eventually died of twenty-four scorpion bites.

5. Personal communication by Mrs. Nasrin Schlamminger (Munich).

6. Written communication by Mr. Norbert Herrmann (Moosburg).

7. Probably the last mentioned aspect provides some clue as to why in the Arab world 'Aqrab is, surprisingly, also known as a personal female name (EISENSTEIN 1991, 227). On the protective function of scorpion figures, compare GLADISS (1999, 160) and SCHIENERL (1984, 96–100).

8. Personal communication by Mr. Ejaz Ullah Baig (Baltit/Hunza in Northern Pakistan).

9. Personal communication by Mr. Abdullah (Urumchi/Sinkiang).

10. Personal communication by Mrs. Massuma Salah (Kabul).

11. Personal communication by Mrs. Khadija Baburi (Kabul).

12. There is even a famous graveyard in Peshawar (North-West Frontier Province/Pakistan) called *sudkhor-kabristan* because of the large number of scorpions found there. *Samnaysin* medical practitioners regularly visit this place in order to catch scorpions for their medicine.

13. This resembles the motif of the “knotted snake” found on a number of medieval healing bowls in the Near East (GLADISS 1999, 159–61).

14. Personal communication by Mrs. Nasrin Schlamminger (Munich).

15. Jaina variants of this theme often mention nuns who are stung by scorpions and who are aware that they are going to die. Nevertheless, after the sting, they carefully place the insects into an earthen pot and carry them out of the house. It is in the nature of scorpions to sting and Jainas are not allowed to kill animals. The motif of nuns stung by scorpions could also be interpreted as a symbol for sexual temptation and for the transgression of moral rules. (I wish to thank Renate Syed for drawing my attention to these narratives and for discussing the material.)

16. The same motif is found in an Afghan folktale from the Timurid period (fifteenth century) in which an obedient military officer allows himself to be stung several times by a scorpion while listening to the commands of the king (GÖPEL 2002, 203–204).

17. Personal communication by Mrs. Nasrin and Mr. Karl Schlamminger (Munich). Apparently it is possible to build up an immunity to the poison, such as, for example, the young Thai lady Kanchana Ketkaew, known as the “Scorpion Queen,” who managed to live for thirty-two days inside a glass case together with about three thousand poisonous scorpions. During her stay she was stung a total of nine times (*The News/Lahore*, 24 Oct. 2002, 22).

18. Personal communication by Mrs. Massuma Salah (Kabul) and Mr. Osman Salimi (Kabul).

19. In a similar way, tribes of South China were known to prepare a strong poison called *ku*. It is said: “Among the Miao, on the fifth day of the fifth month poisonous animals were put into a pot and were allowed to devour each other. The remaining beast was the *ku*. In dried and pulverized form it was taken in tea or wine. Almost the same is reported for a religious leader of the White Lotos sect during the Ming time in Su-chou (Kiangsu): it had to be the fifth day of the fifth month, and among the animals were centipede, snake, scorpion, and the gecko” (EBERHARD 1968, 149–50).

In other parts of China, the poison known as *wu-tu* consisted of snake, scorpion, centipede, toad, and lizard (personal communication by Mr. Bruno Richtsfeld, Munich). Being

a poison and not an antidote, "it could be used as a love charm with the object of forcing the loved male to come back to the woman. The *ku* could be used also as an evil magic with the object of obtaining subservient spirits. This was done by feeding it to unrelated persons who would either spit blood or whose stomachs would swell because the food they had taken would become alive in their insides, and who would die as a result." (EBERHARD 1968, 152).

20. I wish to express my thanks to Mrs. Hannelore Thöner (Deisenhofen) for permission to study her copy of that treatise.

21. GLADISS 1999; CATALOGUE 1996, 41 (No. 19); GIERLICH 1993, Cat. No. 8; SPOER 1935; compare KRISS and KRISS-HEINRICH 1962, 128, 137; SCHIENERL 1984, 82–83.

22. HARVEY 1996, 31 (ill. No. 32), compare 30 (ill. No. 31), 41, 114; FITZ GIBBON & HALE 1994, 74; ANDREWS 1976, 57; VOK and TAUBE 1994, No. 7.

23. I wish to thank my friend Aasim Akhtar (Islamabad) for giving me the opportunity to see and discuss this piece of folk art, which is part of his own collection.

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Asceticism and Sexuality in the Mythology of Śiva. Part I

Author(s): Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty

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Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty

ASCETICISM AND
SEXUALITY IN THE
MYTHOLOGY OF
ŚIVA¹

PART I

A. INTRODUCTION

1. THE RESOLUTION OF MYTHOLOGICAL CONTRADICTIONS

Paradox is the very heart of Śaiva mythology. Although the apparently contradictory strains of Śiva's nature may well have originated at different times and places, they have resulted in a composite deity who is unquestionably whole to his devotees; this is why the Hindus accept and even glorify what might otherwise seem a meaningless patchwork, a crazy quilt of metaphysics. Yet the paradoxes are occasionally as confusing to the Hindu as to the outsider, and this perplexity is often directly expressed by characters within the myths, as well as being indirectly evidenced by the myth-maker's frequent muddling of myth components whose relationships are unclear to him.

In spite of this, one must avoid seeing a contradiction or paradox where the Hindu merely sees an opposition in the Indian sense—correlative opposites that act as interchangeable identities in

¹ This paper and the one to follow in a later issue form a summary of a Harvard dissertation soon to be published in book form with more extensive examples of each mythological theme and more detailed translations from the Sanskrit sources.

essential relationships. The contrast between the erotic and the ascetic tradition in the character and mythology of Śiva is not the kind of "conjunction of opposites" with which it has so often been confused; *tapas* (asceticism) and *kāma* (desire) are not diametrically opposed like black and white, or heat and cold, where the extreme presence of one automatically implies the absence of the other. They are in fact two forms of heat, *tapas* being the potentially destructive or creative fire that the ascetic generates within himself, *kāma* the heat of desire. Thus they are closely related in human terms, opposed in the sense that love and hate are opposed, but not mutually exclusive.

Claude Lévi-Strauss has said, "It is the nature of myth to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction."² Based as they are upon a paradox, many of the Śaiva myths may be analyzed in terms of Lévi-Strauss's oppositions and resolutions; the mediating principle that tends to resolve the oppositions is, in most cases, Śiva himself. Among ascetics he is a libertine and among libertines an ascetic; conflicts which they cannot resolve, or can attempt to resolve only by compromise, he simply absorbs into himself and expresses in terms of other conflicts. Where there is excess, he opposes and controls it; where there is no action, he himself becomes excessively active. He emphasizes that aspect of himself which is unexpected, inappropriate, shattering any attempt to achieve a superficial solution of the conflict through mere logical compromise.

He is able to mediate in this way because of his protean character; he is all things to all men. He merely brings to a head the extreme and therefore least reconcilable aspects of the oppositions, which, although they may be resolved in various ways on the divine level, are almost never reconcilable on the human level. This is in fact the very *raison d'être* of the myth;³ according to Lévi-Strauss, "the extreme positions are only *imagined* in order to show that they are *untenable*."⁴ In this way, the image of the married ascetic functions as a negative truth about one possible way of resolving the paradox at hand; and the image of Śiva, by

² Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in *Myth: A Symposium*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington, Ind.: American Folklore Society, 1958), p. 64.

³ Alan W. Watts, *The Two Hands of God: The Myths of Polarity*, Vol. II of *Patterns of Myth*, ed. Alan W. Watts (3 vols.: New York: George Braziller, 1963), p. 16.

⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Story of Asdiwal," in *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism*, ed. Edmund Leach, Association of Social Anthropologists Monograph #45 (London: Tavistock Publications, 1967), pp. 29-30.

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expressing the extreme and therefore untenable position, illustrates the contradiction inherent in the social facts, the difficulty in human terms of reconciling conflicting moral injunctions.

The expression of contradiction is significant in itself, even without the possibility of resolution, for the problems are difficult to understand and to face, and the myth brings them to a level at which they can be manipulated, just as the unconscious disguises in dreams those elements of experience that cannot be dealt with directly. It is the function of the myth to admit the failure of society to reconcile essential contradictions.⁵ The myths make the Hindu aware of the struggle and of its futility; they show him that his society demands of him two roles which he cannot possibly satisfy fully—that he become a householder and beget sons, and that he renounce life and seek union with God. The myth shows the untenable answer arrived at by compromise—the forest-dweller with his wife—and suggests a solution finally in the re-examination of the nature of the two roles, of the presence of each in the other, so that a balance may be sought without any of the unsatisfactory accommodations necessary in real life. The myth makes it possible to admit that the ideal is not attainable.⁶

One irrational answer to the insoluble problem occurs in an explicit form at many points in the myths where reason is trapped: the excuse of *bhakti*, of devotion of the worshiper toward the god and of the god toward the worshiper, a compelling love which overcomes all rational barriers. Although this is a fairly late solution, it merely makes explicit a tendency which is implicit in the earlier versions as well: the tendency to appeal to the emotions to transcend a rational impasse. This can justify both sides of Śiva's nature; he is hard put to explain his asceticism, since he shares none of the goals of human ascetics, being himself immortal, "released," and the god who grants boons to ascetics; therefore, he attributes his activity to *bhakti*. Thus, in spite of the fact that love for a woman is ostensibly incompatible with the goals of asceticism, Śiva is said to perform *tapas* in order to win the love of Pārvatī,⁷ in order to keep the universe alive, for the sake of his devotees. Similarly, Śiva's sexual activity is rationalized in spite of his ascetic commitments; after arguing against marriage for a

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 27–29.

⁶ Mary Douglas, "The Meaning of Myth, with Special Reference to 'La Geste d'Asdiwal,'" in Leach, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁷ *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa* (Bombay: Gujurati Printing Press, 1913), 22.34–43. *Skanda Purāṇa* (Bombay: Venkaṭeśvara Steam Press, 1867), 1.1.21.15. Hereinafter, all Purāṇas will be cited by particular name alone after the first reference (e.g., *Mahābhāgavata*).

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yogi, Śiva concedes to the gods: "Nevertheless, I will do what you ask, for the benefit of the world. Though the practice of marriage is not suitable for me, as I delight only in *tapas*, nevertheless I will marry for the sake of my devotees."⁸ Pārvatī herself says to Śiva, "You are the best among yogis, but out of pity you have become intent upon love-making."⁹ It is pity alone that can transcend the austere logical purity of Śiva and introduce a merciful sentimentality. Only the emotional involvement, the pity of the gods, causes them to forget that they are above it all—as metaphysics demands—and reduces them to the human level—as mythology demands.

Even when logic can reconcile *tapas* and *kāma*, ascetic and householder, the desire to have it *both* ways remains; Śiva proves to Pārvatī that there is no logical reason for him to have a son, as a mortal man must have; she replies, "What you say is true, but nevertheless I wish to have a child. I long for the kiss of a son's mouth."¹⁰ That "nevertheless" is the mythopoeic and philosophical nexus of the cycle of countless versions of myths, told and retold in an eternal search for the impossible solution.¹¹ The myth expresses the need that can never be fulfilled, that is always just out of reach on one side or the other, even in the world of the gods.

2. THE PARADOX: ŚIVA THE EROTIC ASCETIC

Since Western scholarship first became aware of Hindu mythology, the character of Śiva has remained an enigma. Only a small portion of the corpus of ancient Śaiva mythology has been translated from the Sanskrit; with this inadequate representation, it is not surprising that the mythology of Śiva was considered contradictory and paradoxical, for only the two ends of the spectrum were seen. Śiva the Creator and the Destroyer, Life and Death, the *coincidentia oppositorum*—this much was accepted as consistent with Indian metaphysical thought, and the apparent sexual ambiguity of the god was considered simply one more aspect of a basically ambiguous character or a result of the chance historical assimilation of two opposing strains. In the absence of critical

⁸ *Śiva Purāṇa* (Benares: Paṇḍita Puṣṭakālaya, 1964), 2.2.16.30–36; cf. *Śiva* 2.3.24.60, –.66–67, and –.75. Here and throughout this paper, translations from Sanskrit texts will be summarized, rather than translated literally, and brackets will be placed around material so treated.

⁹ *Śiva* 2.4.4.5.

¹⁰ *Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa*, ed. Hara Prasād Śāstrī, Bibliotheca Indica New Series (Calcutta, 1888–97), 2.60.15–17.

¹¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 229; and Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1966), p. 22.

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editions or translations of the Śaiva Purāṇas,¹² with their rich variety of myths, the problem was never properly considered, and the very fact of its paradoxical nature was taken as an accepted quality of Śaiva thought on which further speculation could be based. René Grousset explained in terms of Śiva's ability to reconcile all contradictions the apparent conflict between his character as god of the *liṅga*, or phallus, and his fame as the ascetic who consumed with the fire from his third eye the god of love, Kāma.¹³ But R. C. Zaehner expresses the enduring enigma of Śiva: "Permanently ithyphallic, yet perpetually chaste: how is one to explain such a phenomenon?"¹⁴

The problem was intensified by uncertainties regarding Śiva's place in the historical development of Hinduism. Failure to connect him with the Vedic gods Indra, Prajāpati, and Agni* led to the assumption that the sexual elements of his cult were "non-Āryan," or at least non-Vedic;¹⁵ and clear correspondences between Śaiva myths and Tantric cult¹⁶ led others to seek the origins of Śiva's sexual ambiguity in this comparatively late development.† Yet what is striking about the problem is that it extends from the period of the Vedas and even earlier, from the prehistoric civilization of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappā, through the development of Tantrism, to the religion of present-day India.

Ancient Hindus as well as modern have been hard put to explain the Śaiva phenomenon. In a Sanskrit poem dating from perhaps A.D. 900, one of Śiva's own hosts muses upon his master:

If he is naked what need then has he of the bow?
If armed with bow then why the holy ashes?
If smeared with ashes what needs he with a woman?
Or if with her, then how can he hate Love?¹⁷

¹² The Purāṇas are Sanskrit texts composed between 300 B.C. and A.D. 800 for the most part, with considerable later additions and much material from an earlier date as well.

¹³ René Grousset, *The Civilization of India* (New York: Knopf, 1931), p. 202.

¹⁴ Robert Charles Zaehner, *Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 113.

* See Section E (Part II).

¹⁵ The Vedas are sacred texts composed in an archaic form of Sanskrit; the Rg Veda, the oldest and most important, reached its present form around 1200 B.C. The Atharva Veda, a collection of magical incantations not directly related to the Vedic sacrifice, was composed several centuries later.

¹⁶ The Tantras are esoteric texts relating to the rites of certain cults which flourished from about the sixth century A.D.

† See below, Section D.

¹⁷ *Subhāṣitaratnaśoṣa* of Vidyākara, ed. D. D. Kosambi and V. Gokhale, Harvard Oriental Series #42 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957); trans. as *An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry*, by Daniel H. H. Ingalls, Harvard Oriental Series #44 (1965), verse #103. All verses from the *Subhāṣitaratnaśoṣa* in this paper are cited in Ingalls' translation.

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This paradox underlies one of the greatest Śaiva myths:

The demon Tāraka usurped the power of the gods, and it was fated that he could only be slain by a son born of Śiva and Pārvatī, the daughter of the mountain Himālaya. But Śiva was constantly performing *tapas* and had no desire to marry; Pārvatī came to serve him in his mountain hermitage, but he took no notice of her. At length, Indra, the king of the gods, sent Kāma, the god of desire, to excite Śiva; though Kāma succeeded in releasing one of his flower arrows toward Śiva's heart, Śiva maintained control of his emotions and burnt Kāma to ashes with the flame which shot forth from the third eye in the middle of his forehead.

Pārvatī then laid aside her royal garments and ornaments and performed such great *tapas* that Śiva resolved to marry her. He came to her in disguise and catalogued in great detail the faults of the god to whom she was devoted, but she remained steadfast. Śiva then revealed himself and their marriage took place.

When, after some time, the love-making of the couple had failed to produce the son needed by the gods, Indra sent Agni to interrupt Śiva and Pārvatī. He succeeded in this but was cursed by Pārvatī to bear the fiery seed of Śiva; unable to bear this torture, Agni placed the seed in the river Ganges, where it was found by the wives of the Seven Sages, known as the Kṛtikās. From the seed a child was born, named Skanda or Kumāra, who slew the demon Tāraka in battle.¹⁸

In one version of this myth, when the gods propose the match to Himālaya, he objects: "It is said that Śiva lives without attachments, and that he performs *tapas* all alone. How then can he

¹⁸ The myth appears in the following Purāṇas: *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* (Bombay: Venkateśvara Steam Press, 1959), 3.4.14.9–85. *Brahma Purāṇa* (Calcutta: Gurumandala Press, 1954), 34–38; 71–72; 128.3–46. *Brahmaṇḍa Purāṇa* (Bombay: Venkateśvara Steam Press, 1857), 4.11.1–34; 4.30.30–101. *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, ed. Hara Prasād Sāstrī (4 vols.; Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series #102, Poona, 1935), 4.38–45; 3.1, 3.2, 3.8–9 and 3.14; 4.46.9–61. *Brhaddharma* 2.53.1–65. *Devabhāgavata Purāṇa* (Benares: Paṇḍita Puṣṭakālaya, 1960), 7.31.4–64; 7.40.38–40. *Kālikā Purāṇa* (Bombay: Venkateśvara Steam Press, 1891), 4–13; 48.12–96. *Liṅga Purāṇa* (Calcutta: Vaṅgavāsī Press, 1812), 1.101–103. *Mahābhāgavata* 12, 14, 15, 20–30. *Matsya Purāṇa* (Poona: Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series #54, 1907), 148.17–24; 154.1–495; 158.25–50. *Padma Purāṇa* (Poona: Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series #131, 1893), 5.40.46–450; 5.41.118–142. *Saura Purāṇa* (Calcutta: Vaṅgavāsī Press, 1816 [Bengali script]), 53–62. *Śiva* 2.2.8–20; 2.3.1–55; 2.4.1–2. *Śiva Purāṇa*, ed. Rājarāma Gaṇeśa Bodaśa, with commentaries (Bombay: Ganpat Krishnaji Press, 1884; to distinguish this from the other *Śiva Purāṇa*, this Bombay edition will always be cited by *Samhitā*), Śatarudrasamhitā 3.33–35; Jñānasamhitā 9, 10, 13–19. *Skanda Purāṇa* (Bombay: Venkateśvara Steam Press, 1867), 1.1.20–27; 1.2.22–26, –29.82–110; 5.1.34.1–80; 5.2.13.23–55; 5.2.20.1–25; 7.1.220.1–30; 7.3.40.4–23. *Vāmana Purāṇa* (Bombay: Venkateśvara Steam Press, 1851), 6.26.107; 51–54; 57. *Varāha Purāṇa* (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, New Series, 1893), 22.1–45; 25.15–16.

The myth also appears in the following Sanskrit texts: Kālidāsa, *Kumārasambhava*, with the commentary of Mallinātha (Bombay: Nirṇaya Sāgara Press, 1955), 1–11. Jayaratha, *Haracaritacintāmaṇi* (Bombay: Kāvyaṃālā Series #61, 1897), 9.3–221. Vālmiki, *Rāmāyaṇa*, ed. G. H. Bhatt (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960), 1.34.13–20; 1.35–36.

The Kumāra birth story alone appears in: Somadeva, *Kathāsaritsāgara* (Bombay: Nirṇaya Sāgara Press, 1930), 3.6.60–88. Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, *Mahābhārata*, ed. Vishnu S. Sukthankar *et al.* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933), 13.83–86 (hereafter, MHB).

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interrupt his trance, and how could he marry any woman but Satī [his wife in a former incarnation], who is dead?"¹⁹ Explicit reasons for Śiva's behavior are given in the course of the myths, but the metaphysical arguments are both secondary and subsequent to the story line of the myth; if philosophy could resolve the problem at the start, there would be no need for the myth to mediate between the two opposed facets; the myth takes over where philosophy proves inadequate. Śiva himself is said to be troubled by the ambivalence in his character, for, when Kāma wounds him, shattering his trance and stirring his desire, Śiva muses, "I dwell ever in *tapas*; how is it then that I am enchanted by Pārvatī?"²⁰ Only involvement in the eternal cycle of the myth can reveal—even to the god himself—the answer to this question.

3. THE RESOLUTION OF THE AMBIVALENCE OF ŚIVA IN THE TEXTS

The solution is not an arbitrary construction of armchair scholarship, meaningless to the creators and preservers of the myths. Throughout Hindu mythology, the so-called opposing strands of Śiva's nature have been resolved and accepted as aspects of one nature. They *may* be separated in certain contexts, and are frequently confused and misunderstood even by the tellers of the tales, but in every age there have been notable examples of satisfactory resolution. The Śiva of Brahmin philosophy is predominantly ascetic; the Śiva of the Tantras is predominantly sexual; but even in each of these, elements of the contrasting aspect are present, and in the myths—which form a bridge between rational philosophy and irrational cult—Śiva appears far more often in his dual nature than in either one or the other.

As early as the Atharva Veda hymn to the *brahmacārīn* (chaste student), there is a detailed description of a sage with whom Jarl Charpentier has identified Śiva himself, the great ascetic creator but also the great *liṅga*-bearer, who spills his seed upon the earth.²¹ The first explicit reference to Śiva in his ambiguous sexuality appears in the *Mahābhārata*:²² "Whose semen was offered as an

¹⁹ *Kālikā* 42.71–77.

²⁰ *Skanda* 1.1.21.70.

²¹ Atharva Veda, with the commentary of Sāyaṇa, ed. Shankar Pāndurang Pandit (Bombay: Government Central Book Depot, 1895), XI.5.5.–12; cf. Jarl Charpentier, "Über Rudra-Śiva," *Wiener Zeitschrift zur Kunde des Morgenlandes* XXIII (1909), p. 154; and Maurice Bloomfield (trans.), *Atharva Veda* (Oxford: Sacred Books of the East #42, 1897), p. 627.

²² The *Mahābhārata* is the great epic of India, 200,000 lines composed between 300 B.C. and A.D. 300; the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the second epic, is much shorter, deals primarily with the adventures of Rāma, an avatar of Viṣṇu, and was composed during the same period.

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oblation into the mouth of fire, and whose semen was made into a golden mountain? Who else can be said to be a naked *brahmacārīn* with his vital seed drawn up? Who else shares half his body with his wife and has been able to subjugate Kāma?"²³ The seed spilt creatively and contained in chastity; the ultimate act of desire (androgynous union) and the conquest of desire—the essence of Śaiva mythology is in this passage.

The concept persists throughout the Purāṇas: Śiva says that if he marries, his wife must be a *yoginī* (female ascetic) when he does yoga, and a lustful mistress (*kāminī*) when he is full of desire.²⁴ The sage Nārada describes Śiva: "On Kailāsa mountain, Śiva lives as a naked yogi. His wife, Pārvatī, is the most beautiful woman in the universe, capable of bewitching even the best of yogis. Though Śiva is the enemy of Kāma, and is without passion, he is her slave."²⁵ So completely are the roles of ascetic and lover combined that the myth-makers themselves confuse them; in the story of the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī, the Seven Sages say to her: "How can you enjoy the pleasures of the body with an ascetic [*yati*] like him, so terrifying and disgusting?" But in another version of this same text they say: "How can you enjoy the pleasures of the body with a husband [*pati*] like him, so terrifying and disgusting?"²⁶ The sense remains the same in both readings, for the two roles are being compared and in fact interchanged.

A similar combination of roles appears in the myth of the Pine Forest, in which Śiva comes in disguise to a group of sages who are practicing violent asceticism with their wives; when the sages, accusing him of seducing their wives, castrate²⁷ him by a curse, Śiva reveals himself to them and teaches them to worship his fallen *liṅga*.²⁸ In one version of this myth, the sages' curse is

²³ MHB XIII, Appendix 1, #5, 47–50.

²⁴ Śiva 2.2.16.39; also Kālikā 9.49–50.

²⁵ Śiva 2.5.18.44–51.

²⁶ Matsya 154.331–333 and Padma 5.40.323–325.

²⁷ Throughout this paper, "castration" will refer to the mutilation of the phallus as well as or instead of the testicles.

²⁸ This myth is told in the following Purāṇas: *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.27.1–127. *Kūrma Purāṇa* (Bombay: Venkaṭeśvara, 1926), 1.16.97–126; 2.38.1–83, 2.39.1–80. *Liṅga* 1.29, 1.31, 1.33–34. *Padma* 5.17.35–84. *Sāmba Purāṇa* (Bombay: Venkaṭeśvara, 1942), 16.24–33, 17.1–22. *Saura* 69.34–54. *Śiva* 4.12.1–54. *Śiva*, *Jñānasamhitā* 42.1–51; *Dharmasamhitā* 10.78–233. *Skanda* 1.1.6.2–68; 5.2.8.1–45; 5.2.11.1–25; 5.3.38.6–68; 6.1.5–64; 6.258–59; 7.1.187.14–40; 7.3.39.5–38. *Vāmana* 6.60–93; 43.40–95; 44.1–39.

Also: *Haracaritāntāmaṇi* 10.3–188. Kṣemendra, *Darpadalana* (Bombay: Kāvyaṃālā Series #6, 1890), 7.1–71. *Yāgīśvara Māhātmya* (India Office MS #3719, reproduced by Wilhelm Jahn in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, LXX, 1916, pp. 310–20). R. Dessigane, Jean Filliozat, and P. Z. Pattabiramin, *La Légende des Jeux de Śiva à Madurai (Hālāśyamāhātmya)*

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this: "If we have served Śiva from our birth with *tapas*, then let the *liṅga* of this libertine fall to the earth."²⁹ Thus they swear by Śiva the ascetic to destroy Śiva the erotic, not realizing that the two are one. This is implicit in other versions of the myth as well, for the sages use the *tapas* of Śiva (their fiery curse) against the lust of Śiva (his *liṅga*), and must be punished before they are able to realize the unity of the two powers.

For the yogi himself, using Śiva as his model, the god might appear in either aspect according to the worshiper's need: "The yogi who thinks of Śiva as devoid of passion himself enjoys freedom from passion; the yogi who meditates upon Śiva as full of passion himself will certainly enjoy passion."³⁰ Nor was this choice limited to the initiated; a popular hymn to Śiva in Orissa says, "He is the much beloved husband of Gaurī [Pārvatī] and the only object of adoration by the ascetic."³¹ It would seem that this ambiguity is comprehensible and acceptable to Hindus of various ages and beliefs, notwithstanding its apparent logical contradiction and the difficulties which arise when its implications are literally applied to an actual or mythological social situation.

4. THE ICONIC RESOLUTION OF THE PARADOX: THE ITHYPHALLIC YOGI

Sir John Marshall noted in the prehistoric Indus civilization a seal on which was depicted a male god whom he identified as a prototype of Śiva;³² the figure is seated in a posture of yoga and has an exposed, erect phallus. There is good reason to support the identification of this figure with Śiva,³³ but even if this is not accepted, the seal is evidence of a very early correlation between asceticism and sexuality. The image of the ithyphallic yogi persists throughout Hindu sculpture as an attribute of Śiva.³⁴

(Pondichéry: Institut Francais d'Indologie, #19; 2 vols.; 1960), #32; and Dessigane, Filliozat, and Pattabiramin, *Les Légendes Śivaïtes de Kāñcīpuram* (Pondichéry: #27, 1964), #40.

²⁹ *Haracaritacintāmaṇi* 10.74–75.

³⁰ *Yogaśāstra*, quoted in the *Tarkarahasyadīpikā*, cited by D. R. Bhandarkar, "Lakuliṣa," in *Report of the Archeological Survey of India* (Delhi, 1906–7), p. 190.

³¹ Benoy Kumar Sarkar, *The Folk Element in Hindu Culture* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1917), p. 71.

³² Sir John Marshall, *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization* (3 vols.; London: Arthur Probsthain, 1931), I, chap. v; Pl. 15, #17; pp. 52 and 55n.

³³ Cf. Stuart Piggott, *Prehistoric India* (London: Penguin, 1952), p. 202; Amalananda Ghosh, "Śiva: His Pre-Āryan Origin," in *Indian Culture II* (1936), p. 767; Zaehner, *Hinduism*, pp. 20 and 110.

³⁴ Cf. T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography* (2 vols.; Madras: Law Printing House, 1916), I, p. 22; Jitendra Nath Banerjĳa, *The Development of Hindu Iconography* (2d. ed.; Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1956), pp. 48 and 457, Pl. xxxix #2; K. C. Panigrahi, "Sculptural Representations of Lakuliṣa and

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The ambiguity of its connotation is possible because, although the erect phallus is of course a sign of priapism, in Indian culture it is a symbol of chastity as well. The basic expression for the practice of chastity is the drawing up of the seed (*ūrdhvaretas*); but, by synecdoche, the seed is often confused with the *liṅga* itself, which is "raised" in chastity. Thus the *Mahābhārata* gives Śiva the epithets *ūrdhvaretas* and *ūrdhvaliṅga*, "he whose seed is raised up, whose *liṅga* is raised up."³⁵ Even without this confusion, the image of the erect phallus is in itself accepted as representative of chastity; when the seed is drawn up, Śiva is a pillar (*sthānu*) of chastity;³⁶ yet the pillar is also the form of the erect *liṅga*: "It is in this form of the Lord of Yogins that he becomes Sthānu or of *liṅga* form."³⁷ Moreover, in the context of the Hindu philosophy of sexual powers, Śiva's chastity is the source of his erotic power,[‡] and so the erect phallus can represent both phases.

In Sanskrit literature, Śiva is often described as ithyphallic,³⁸ particularly in the Pine Forest myth.³⁹ Frequently this condition is equated with a state of chastity;⁴⁰ the commentary on Śiva's *Mahābhārata* epithet states the rationalization of the ithyphallic state as chaste rather than erotic: "He is called *ūrdhvaliṅga*, because the lowered *liṅga* sheds its seed, but not the raised *liṅga*."⁴¹ The ithyphallic condition has been attributed by some, not to priapism, but to the Tantric ritual of seminal retention;⁴² § to a certain extent, this technique may be considered a manifestation of yogic chastity, but Śiva's raised *liṅga* is symbolic of the power

other Pāsupata Teachers," in *Journal of Indian History*, XXXVIII, iii (1960), p. 640; Ghosh, *op. cit.* (n. 33 above), pp. 765-66; Alain Daniélou, *L'Érotisme Divinisé* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1962), pp. 20, 32, plate on p. 29; Hermann Goetz, *The Art and Architecture of Bikaner State* (Oxford, 1950), Pl. 4, Fig. 4; Philip Rawson, *Indian Sculpture* (New York: Dutton, 1966), p. 46; R. D. Banerjee, *The Eastern Indian School of Medieval Sculpture*, Archeological Survey of India #47 (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1933), Pls. LII a-b, LIIa, LIV c, LV b and d, LVI b; Ramprasad Chanda, *Explorations in Orissa*, Memoirs of the Archeological Survey of India #44 (Calcutta: Government of India Central Publication Branch, 1930), Pls. VII 1-2; also *Matsya Purāṇa* 260.7.

³⁵ MHB XIII.17.45.

³⁶ *Matsya* 4.30-32; *Skanda* 7.2.9.5-17.

³⁷ Vasudeva Sarana Agrawala, *Śiva Mahādeva, The Great God: An Exposition of the Symbolism of Śiva* (Benares: Veda Academy, 1966), p. 3.

[‡] See below, Section B.

³⁸ MHB XIII.17.45, -.74, -.83; XIII.146.17; X.7.37; *Liṅga* 1.20.61; *Padma* 5.17.57.

³⁹ *Śiva*, *Dharmasamhitā* 10.79; *Vāmana* 43.71.

⁴⁰ MHB XIII.17.58; VII.173.83-84, -.92; XIII.146.10-17.

⁴¹ *Mahābhārata*, with the commentary of Nilakaṇṭha (Bombay: 1862), XIII.17 45-46.

⁴² Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition* (London: Rider & Co., 1965), p. 296.

§ See below, Section D 4.

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to spill the seed as well as to retain it. || Thus Alain Daniélou writes :

Shiva, the god of eroticism, is also the master of the method by which the virile force may be sublimated and transformed into a mental force, an intellectual power. This method is called Yoga, and Shiva is the great yogi, the founder of Yoga. We see him represented as an ithyphallic yogi. . . . Assuming the various postures of Yoga, Shiva creates the different varieties of beings. . . . Then in the posture of realisation (*siddhāsana*) he reintegrates into himself all the universe which he has created. It is in this posture that he is most often represented. His erect phallus is swollen with all the potentialities of future creations.⁴³

The yogi here gathers up his creative powers, retaining the promise of future creation in the form of the erect phallus, the embodiment of creative *tapas*.

For the image retains its primary, more natural significance, as is clear from the statues of the ithyphallic Śiva embraced by Pārvatī;⁴⁴ it may symbolize actual, as well as potential or sublimated, eroticism. In a myth told among the Lanjhia Saora, it is said that a woman found an amputated phallus, and, "thinking it to be Mahadeo's [Śiva's] *liṅga*, took it home and worshiped it. At night she used to take it to bed with her and use it for her pleasure."⁴⁵ In a similar manner, a female figure carved on the temple at Konarak is clearly using a stone Śiva-*liṅga* as a sexual device,⁴⁶ an act which seems to be explicitly prohibited in the lawbooks.⁴⁷ The wives of the Pine Forest sages touch Śiva's erect *liṅga*,⁴⁸ as does Pārvatī in a well-known sculpture;⁴⁹ his erect phallus is adorned sometimes with red chalk and bright white charcoal and sometimes with bracelets as he dances erotically in the Pine Forest.⁵⁰ In this way, the image of the ithyphallic yogi retains its ambiguities in myth, icon, and cult, simultaneously representative of chastity and sexuality.

|| See Section E 4-5 (Part II).

⁴³ Daniélou, *op. cit.* (n. 34 above), p. 42.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20; J. N. Banerjea, *op. cit.*, Pl. xxxix #2; Mulk Raj Anand, *Kāma Kalā: Some Notes on the Philosophical Basis of Hindu Erotic Sculpture* (Geneva: Nagel, 1960), Pl. lxiv.

⁴⁵ Verrier Elwin, *Myths of Middle India* (Oxford: Cumberlege, 1949), p. 473.

⁴⁶ Kanwar Lal, *The Cult of Desire: An Interpretation of the Erotic Sculpture of India* (2d ed.: London: Luxor Press, 1967), Pl. 73.

⁴⁷ Kautilya, *Arthasāstra*, ed. Julius Jolly (Lahore: Punjab Sanskrit Series #4, Motilal Banarsidass, 1923), 4.13.41.

⁴⁸ *Skanda* 7.3.39.10.

⁴⁹ Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁵⁰ *Brahmaṇḍa* 2.27.12; *Padma* 5.5.45.

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B. SEX AND ASCETICISM IN INDIAN RELIGION

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF CHASTITY AND CREATIVE "TAPAS"

Chastity was characteristic of Indian asceticism from the very start. The Upaniṣads say that one may realize the Self by practicing *tapas* in the forest, free from passion;⁵¹ a Purāṇa passage states: "The 88,000 sages who desired offspring went South and obtained graves; but the 88,000 who did not desire offspring went North and obtained immortality."⁵² In a late version of the story of Viṣṇu's avatar as a boar, Śiva appears in a characteristic role, that of the ascetic who rescues a man from the troubles arising from marital involvements:

Once long ago, when the Earth was in danger of drowning in the cosmic floods, Viṣṇu took the form of a boar and saved her. Śiva then said to him, "Now that you have accomplished the task for which you assumed the form of a boar, you must abandon that form. The Earth cannot bear you and is becoming exhausted; she is full of passion, and she has become heated in the water. She has received a terrible embryo from you, who will be born as a demon harmful to the gods. You must abandon this erotic boar form." Viṣṇu agreed with Śiva, but he kept the form of a boar and continued to make love to the Earth, who had taken the form of a female boar. Many years passed, and the Earth brought forth three sons, and when Viṣṇu was surrounded by his sons and his wife he forgot all about his promise to abandon his body. The sons played together and shattered all the worlds, but even though Viṣṇu knew of this, he did not stop them, for he loved his sons; his passion for his wife grew greater and greater. Finally he remembered his promise and begged Śiva to kill him; Śiva took the form of the mythical *śarabha* beast and killed Viṣṇu and his three sons, and the essence of Viṣṇu was freed from the boar form.⁵³

Deluded by involvement with a woman and children, Viṣṇu finds himself unable to do what he knows to be right; and though he wishes to be freed of his body—as the sage wishes to escape from rebirth—he needs the help of Śiva, the great ascetic, to enlighten him.

Although in human terms asceticism is opposed to sexuality and fertility, in mythological terms *tapas* is itself a powerful creative force, a generative power of ascetic heat. In a late Ṛg Vedic creation hymn, it is from *tapas* that the One is born, and in the Atharva Veda hymn to the *brahmacārin*, the chaste sage creates by

⁵¹ *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.11; *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.10.1–6; in *One Hundred and Eight Upanishads* (Isha and Others), ed. Wāsudev Laxmaṇ Shāstrī Paṇṣīkar (Bombay: Nirṇaya Sāgara Press, 1913).

⁵² *Āpastambīya Dharmasūtra* [*Aphorisms on the Sacred Law of the Hindus*, by Āpastamba], ed. Georg Bühler (2d ed.; Bombay: Government Central Book Depot, 1892), 2.9.23.4; cf. *Vāyu Purāṇa* (Bombay: Venkaṭeśvara, 1867), 1.50. 213–20.

⁵³ *Kālikā* 30.1–42, 31.1–153.

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performing *tapas* in the ocean.⁵⁴ In the Brāhmaṇas,⁵⁵ Prajāpati, the Creator, assumes the *brahmacārin*'s role :

Prajāpati was alone here in the beginning. He desired, "May I exist, may I reproduce myself." He exerted himself and performed *tapas*, and when he was exhausted and heated the waters were created from him. For waters are born from the heated Man. The waters said, "What is to become of us?" He said, "You shall be heated." They were heated and created foam. For foam is born in heated water.⁵⁶

The creative power of heat, particularly when placed in water, is the starting point in all of these cosmogonic myths; from *tapas*, Prajāpati proceeds to create fire, light, air, sun, moon, dawn, etc.⁵⁷

2. THE SEDUCTION OF THE ASCETIC

The ascetic must remain chaste to generate *tapas*: this belief underlies the famous *Mahābhārata* myth of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, whose chastity is able to produce rain :

King Lomapāda was guilty of a transgression against a Brahmin, and so Indra# sent no rain in his land. The king's ministers advised him to bring to the palace the sage Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, who had lived in complete chastity in the forest all his life, and had never seen a woman. They said, "If Ṛṣyaśṛṅga may be enticed and lured into your kingdom, Indra will send rain to you immediately." The king sent a prostitute to the forest, who served Ṛṣyaśṛṅga and plied him with garlands, drinks, and embraces, until he was overpowered with love for her, emotionally aroused and maddened with passion. Although his father warned him against such "demons," the young sage followed the prostitute to the women's quarters of the palace, and the rain fell. King Lomapāda gave his daughter, Śāntā, to Ṛṣyaśṛṅga in marriage.⁵⁸

The Epic states that Ṛṣyaśṛṅga's purity and chastity give him the power to bring the rain,⁵⁹ and although the prostitute embraces him, she does not actually seduce him. Even when he is overcome by her charms, he invites her to perform *tapas* with him, and later he describes her to his father as a particularly delightful sort of

⁵⁴ *Rg Veda* [*Rig-Veda Samhita*], with the commentary of Sāyaṇa, ed. Max Müller (6 vols.; London: William H. Allen, 1890-92) X.129.3; Atharva Veda XI.5.5, -7, -10, and -26.

⁵⁵ The Brāhmaṇas are sacred texts elaborating upon the details of the ritual of the Vedas; they were composed from 800 to 500 B.C.

⁵⁶ *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* of the White Yajur Veda, with the commentary of Sāyaṇa, ed. Satyavratā Sāmasvāmī (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1903) 6.1.3.1-2; cf. *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, with the commentary of Sāyaṇa, ed. Kāśinātha Śāstry Āgāse (Poona: Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series #32, 1896) 10.1.5 and 11.6.4.

⁵⁷ *Kausitaki Brāhmaṇa* [*Sāṅkhāyana Brāhmaṇa*], ed. Gulbarāya Vajasaṅkara Chaya (Poona: Ānandāśrama #65, 1911) 6.1; and *Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa* of the Black Yajur Veda, with the commentary of Sāyaṇa, ed. Rajendra Mitra (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1859), 2.2.9.1.

See Section E 2 (Part II).

⁵⁸ MHB III.110.17-36; -111.1-22; -112.1-18; -113.1-12.

⁵⁹ MHB III.110.3 and -25-26.

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ascetic, with beautiful "rosaries" (garlands) and "matted locks" (long hair perfumed and bound with gold).⁶⁰ This is the ascetic viewpoint reduced to the absurd.

On the other hand, there is much to suggest that he is in fact seduced, and that it is his fall from chastity, rather than his unbroken chastity, that brings the rain; he must be "enticed," rather than summoned by royal command in order for the rain to fall, and he is so overpowered with love for the prostitute that he in no way resists her enticements but follows her to the palace. Leopold von Schroeder considered the myth the reworking of a generation rite in which sexual union actually took place, the union itself causing the rain;⁶¹ this simple analogy works on the principle of sympathetic magic. Von Schroeder's view is substantiated by the Buddhist version of the tale:

Isisinga [Rṣyaśrṅga] performed such great *tapas* that Sakka [Indra] was shaken and determined to break down his virtue. For three years he sent no rain, advising the king of Benares, "Send your daughter Nalinikā to break the virtue of Isisinga and it will rain; for his fierce *tapas* has caused the rain to stop." She went to him and enticed him, and he thought her to be some marvellous ascetic. His virtue was overcome, his meditation broken off, and he made love to her. Then she ran away from him, and Sakka sent rain that day. Isisinga longed for Nalinikā, still thinking that she had been an ascetic, until his father returned and realized from Isisinga's report that a woman had broken his virtue. He told his son, "This was a female demon; you must always avoid them," and Isisinga then returned to his meditation.⁶²

This version shows the classical pattern of the myth of the ascetic seduced by a prostitute, an important theme in Indian literature,⁶³ as, indeed, in many other literatures. Indra appears as the enemy of the ascetic whose chastity is a *threat* to rain and

⁶⁰ MHB III.111.10, -112.1-18.

⁶¹ Johann Jakob Meyer, *Sexual Life in Ancient India* (New York: Dutton, 1930), p. 292.

⁶² "Nalinikā Jātaka," in *Jātaka*, with commentary [*Tales of the Anterior Births of Gotama Buddha*], ed. Viggo Fausbøll (7 vols.; London: Trübner, 1877), #526, V, 193-209.

⁶³ *Brahmavaivarta* 4.31-33; *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (Bombay: Venkateśvara, 1890), 1.27-54, 2.4-16; *Bytal Pucceesee*, trans. Captain W. Hollings (4th ed.; Lucknow: Newul Kishore Press, 1884), pp. 4-5; Sir George Abraham Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, IX, IV (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1916), p. 74; *Caitanya Carita Antya* 3.94, cited by Edward C. Dimock, Jr., in *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaiṣṇava Sāhajīyā Cult of Bengal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 154-55; cf. George Weston Briggs, *Gorakhnāth and the Kānpata Yogis* (Calcutta: YMCA Publishing House; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 212; *Jaiminiya [Tālavakāra] Brāhmaṇa* of the Sāma Veda (Nagpur: Sarasvatī-vihāra Series #31, 1954), 2.405; Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (Bollingen Series LVI; New York: Pantheon, 1958), p. 257; Leopold von Schroeder, *Mysterium und Mimik im Rig Veda* (Leipzig: H. Haessel Verlag, 1908), p. 166; Lal, *op. cit.* (n. 46 above), pp. 67, 102, Pl. 104; Abbé J. A. Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. Henry K. Beauchamp (3rd ed.; Oxford, 1959), p. 310.

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fertility, not a source of it; he brings about the seduction of Rṣyaśrṅga just as he causes Kāma to assist Pārvatī in the seduction of Śiva.⁶⁴ After the seduction, the ascetic returns to his meditation; the phases of chastity and sexuality alternate.

In terms of the general pattern, this Buddhist version would seem to be older than that of the *Mahābhārata*, the theme of the seduced ascetic being more basic in India than that of the incorruptible ascetic. Moreover, the *Rāmāyaṇa* version of the myth tends also to support the suggestion of von Schroeder; for, although it tells the story in much the same way as the *Mahābhārata*, it introduces it with a statement that Rṣyaśrṅga was sent for in order to perform a sacrifice for King Daśaratha to obtain a son⁶⁵—an indication of the sage's own sexual powers. In the tale of Rṣyaśrṅga, as in the story of the temptation of Śiva by Pārvatī,** there seems to be a very real ambiguity about the success or failure of the seduction. In fact, it is the combination of the two—the sage's original steadfastness and his eventual surrender—that produces the desired result, but different versions emphasize one aspect or the other to produce an apparent paradox.

Except in the more ribald versions of the theme, and sometimes even there, the ascetic learns something of value from his contact with the woman of the world; an important path of communication is established between the two opposed world views. The necessity for a prostitute as the partner of the ascetic is not merely a result of the metaphysics of the conjunction of opposites, of the representatives of *tapas* and *kāma*, but in part a consequence of the simple logistics of the necessary plot: after his experience with the woman, the ascetic must be free to return to his yoga, in order to avoid the problems attendant upon the combination of asceticism and marriage. The one woman who can allow him to do this is the prostitute, who is sexually free just as he is, moving below the morals of conventional Hinduism just as he moves above them. Much of the Rṣyaśrṅga story resembles the tale of Enkidu in the Gilgamesh Epic; Enkidu had lived in chastity among the animals in the wilderness until a harlot was sent to tame him so that he could become human and gentle enough to befriend Gilgamesh.⁶⁶ The Hindu ascetic must be "tamed" as well, and it is Śiva himself

⁶⁴ *Mahābhāgavata* 22.34–43; *Matsya* 47.113–127 and –.170–213; *Padma* 5.13.257–313; *Vāyu* 2.35–36; *Śiva* 2.3.17.19–22; *Saura* 53.48; *Kumārasambhava* 3.4; MHB V.15.2–25.

⁶⁵ *Rāmāyaṇa* I.8.7–23, I.9.1–14; I.7 and I.10.

** See Section G 1–4 (Part II).

⁶⁶ Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet 1, column 3, lines 42 ff., Heidel edition.

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—taking the place of Indra, as he often does—who usually undertakes this task, to remind the yogi of the need to participate in the world of the flesh as well as the world of the spirit.††

3. CHASTITY AND THE LOSS OF CHASTITY

In the attempt to combine and give full value to the experiences of the two worlds, the myth of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga comes to terms with a problem central to Hindu mythology: Both chastity and the loss of chastity are necessary for fertility. The earliest expression of this conflict appears in an obscure hymn of the Ṛg Veda,⁶⁷ a dialogue between the sage Agastya and his wife Lopāmudrā:

1. [Spoken by Lopāmudrā]: “For many years I have exhausted myself and now I have become old. Age wears away the beauty of bodies. Men should go to their wives.” [Sāyaṇa, the commentator, notes that the wives also practise *tapas*.]

2. “The pious sages of ancient times, who conversed about sacred truths with the gods, ceased [from the performance of *tapas*] for they did not find the End. [Sāyaṇa: Without achieving success in *brahmacarya* [chaste study] they died.] Women should go with their husbands.”

3. [Spoken by Agastya]: “Not in vain is all this toil, which the gods encourage. We must undertake it with all efforts. By this we will win the race that is won by a hundred artifices, when we unite together as a pair.” [Sāyaṇa: “We will win the battle of sexual intercourse when we procreate in the proper way”—in this way he accedes to the sexual union that she spoke of.]

[According to von Schroeder, ritual intercourse took place here, between the recital of verses 3 and 4.⁶⁸ Karl Geldner says that “the enjoyment of love will be masked here with various images.”]⁶⁹

4. [Lopāmudrā]: “Desire for the bull who roars and is held back [Sāyaṇa: he holds back his seed as he practises chastity] has overcome me, coming upon me from all sides.” [The poet]: Lopāmudrā entices the man; the foolish woman sucks dry the wise man.

5. [Agastya]: “By this Soma which I have drunk, in my innermost heart I say: Let him forgive us if we have sinned, for a mortal is full of many desires.”

6. [The poet]: Agastya, digging with spades [Geldner: “A new image for the enjoyment of love”], wishing for progeny, children, and strength, nourished both paths [Sāyaṇa: *kāma* and *tapas*], for he was a powerful sage. Among the gods, he found fulfilment of his desires.

In this complex and intriguing hymn, Agastya’s position is unclear and yet crucial. A traditional Indian interpretation is expressed in the *Brhaddevatā*: “The sage began, from desire of secret union, to talk to his wife, the illustrious Lopāmudrā [sic], when she had bathed after her period. With the two stanzas she expressed what she wished to do. Then Agastya, desiring to make

†† See Section H 1 (Part II).

⁶⁷ Ṛg Veda I.179.

⁶⁸ Von Schroeder, *op. cit.* (n. 63 above), p. 160.

⁶⁹ *Der Rig-Veda*, trans. [into German] Karl Friedrich Geldner (3 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard Oriental Series #33–35, 1951), I, 257.

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love to her, satisfied her with the two following stanzas.”⁷⁰ The statement that Agastya himself desires the union seems to be based upon the third verse as well as the fourth, which the *Bṛhad-devatā* attributes to Agastya; Lopamudrā merely convinces him to break his chastity sooner than he had intended. Yet the verse of expiation seems to indicate that Agastya has been persuaded to violate his vow. Hermann Oldenberg suggests that the circumstances might have been such that Agastya’s “holy purity” was not actually violated—that she might have approached him while he was asleep, for instance;⁷¹ this would imply that the drinking of the Soma was an expiation for the mere desire, rather than the act, but it seems more likely that actual, conscious union did take place. In spite of the expiation, von Schroeder maintains that “what they did was not a sacrilege but a richly blessed act, and it is rewarded, rather than punished”; and he notes that intercourse in fertility rites is especially powerful when performed by one who has practiced chastity until then.⁷²

Here is the core of the matter: it is necessary to amass powers of fertility by the practice of chastity, and then to put them to use by the breaking of that very vow; the views are complementary, not opposed. Jakob Wilhelm Hauer saw in the Agastya hymn two “quite opposed concepts of ecstatic practice,” the praise of chastity (verses 1–3) and the praise of intercourse as a source of power and fertility (verses 4–6).⁷³ The verses cannot be divided quite so neatly; both views appear throughout the hymn, constantly readjusting the balance. The poet of the hymn speaks with disdain of the foolish woman who sucks the wise man dry, an instance of the traditional misogyny of the Indian ascetic tradition, but he also notes that Agastya found strength and power by nourishing both paths, chastity and fertility. The hymn speaks of sin and expiation, but it speaks too of the winning of the race and the fulfilment of desires among the gods.

In the *Mahābhārata* version of the myth of Agastya, the sage desires to break his vow of chastity and in fact has difficulty in persuading Lopamudrā to break *her* vow:

The chaste sage Agastya was asked by his ancestors to marry and procure offspring to perform the death rites for them in perpetuity. Agastya created

⁷⁰ *Bṛhaddevatā*, attributed to Śaunaka, ed. Arthur Anthony Macdonnell (2 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard Oriental Series #5–6, 1904), 4.57–58.

⁷¹ Hermann Oldenberg, “Ākhyāna-Hymnen im R̥g Veda,” ZDMG XXXIX (1884–85), pp. 65–68.

⁷² Von Schroeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 159, 161–62.

⁷³ Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, *Die Anfänge der Yogapraxis im Alten Indien* (Berlin: W. Kohlhammer, 1922), p. 38.

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a beautiful woman whom he caused to be born as the daughter of the King of Vidarbha, named Lopāmudrā. When Agastya asked the king for her, the king was unwilling to give her to him, but Agastya threatened to burn everything with the power of his *tapas*, and Lopāmudrā herself asked to be given to Agastya. He then asked her to discard her ornaments and to dress herself in rags, bark clothes, and deer-skins; then they practised *tapas* together. When he saw her shining with her *tapas*, the sage asked her to make love with him, but she said, ashamed, "I will not approach you dressed in the rags of asceticism, for this ochre robe must not be made impure in any way. But dress me and yourself in heavenly ornaments, and I will come to you." He argued that if he used his powers of *tapas* to obtain riches it would destroy his ascetic powers, but she was adamant. After various adventures, Agastya succeeded in fulfilling the conditions, and Lopāmudrā bore him a great son.⁷⁴

Several elements of the Ṛṣyaśrṅga tale may be seen here: the princess comes to the ascetic at the command of her father, to avoid a curse (here, the threat of *tapas* is a direct force of fire, replacing the indirect drought of the Ṛṣyaśrṅga tale); she performs asceticism with him and exchanges ascetic garments for royal ones (having first changed from royal to ascetic at his request), as Ṛṣyaśrṅga mistakes royal ones for ascetic. The force of the Vedic hymn of Agastya is retained, although the roles are somewhat reversed; the combined forces of chastity and sexuality produce a son.

4. THE EROTIC APPEAL OF THE ASCETIC

What is striking about the *Mahābhārata* reworking of the Agastya hymn is the passion which Lopāmudrā stirs when she becomes a female ascetic (a role which, according to Sāyaṇa, she plays in the Vedic hymn); in the earlier version, it is Agastya's ascetic status which excites her: "She desires the bull who is held back." In either direction, the force is clear and psychologically valid: the ascetic, whose chastity generates powers of fertility, becomes an object of desire, in part merely because he is forbidden. A tale illustrating this point is told about Pūran, the disciple of the great yogi Gorakh Nāth:

Pūran performed *tapas* for thirty-six years. When Gorakh Nāth was about to make him a saint, one of the disciples said, "Test him first by making him beg alms from Rāni Sundrā ["the Beautiful Queen"]." Pūran went there, covered with ashes, and a handmaiden told the Queen, "A handsome yogi with red eyes has come here. He will not accept alms from anyone but you. When I saw his beauty I fainted." When the Queen saw Pūran, she said, "I would kill the faqīr that rubbed the ashes on you. Why should you be a saint? Be my husband." Pūran returned to Gorakh Nāth with the alms, whereupon his ears were pierced in the ceremony that made him a saint. But the Queen went to Gorakh Nāth and said, "If you are a true guru,

⁷⁴ MHB III.94.1-27, -.95.1-24, -.97.17-25.

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give Pūran to me as alms." Gorakh Nāth told Pūran to go with her, and when they were alone she said, "Be my husband; don't be a saint, for Gorakh gave you to me for alms." Pūran stayed with her for four hours and then left her. Broken hearted, the Queen said to Gorakh, "Give him to me or I will kill myself; or at least make me a disciple too, so that I may remain with him." But Gorakh said, "He whose clothes are red and whose mind is clear never returns from the wilds. Is a yogi anyone's friend?" And the Queen killed herself.⁷⁵

The yogi and the princess; the woman's offer to do asceticism with him; the ultimate return to the wilderness—these are familiar themes. His asceticism is a challenge to her, as Agastya's is to Lopāmudrā, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga's to the prostitute, Śiva's to Pārvatī. The intentional wrongheadedness which sometimes underlies this phenomenon can be seen in the words placed in the mouth of a Buddhist monk in a satirical play: "Ah, how delightful is the touch of this Kapālīnī [ascetic woman of the Śaiva Kapālin sect]! Often have I ardently embraced widows . . . but such rapturous emotions were never excited as by touching the rising breasts of this Kapālīnī."⁷⁶ A widow is the epitome of the sexually taboo Hindu woman; the sin of sexual contact with her is exceeded only by the consequences of incest, and intercourse with a female ascetic is a crime tantamount to incest.⁷⁷

But the appeal of the ascetic is best understood in terms of powers rather than of morals. "The yogin becomes as strong and beautiful as a god, and women desire him, but he must persevere in chastity; on account of the retention of semen there will be generated an agreeable smell in the body of the yogin."⁷⁸ By "drawing up his seed," the yogi preserves all his powers, particularly, of course, those he is explicitly holding in, sexual powers.

5. THE EROTIC POWERS OF THE ASCETIC

Even in the *Kāmasūtra*, the textbook of erotic science and hence ostensibly opposed to the ascetic establishment, this concept, so basic to all Hindu thought, emerges: The successful lover is one who has conquered his senses and is not excessively passionate; he obtains his powers by *brahmacarya* and great meditation.⁷⁹ The chaste ascetic is not only sexually attractive; he is sexually active. Many of the central images of sculpture at Khajuraho are of a

⁷⁵ Sir Richard Carnac Temple, *The Legends of the Punjab* (3 vols.; Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1884, 1885, 1900), II.441–48.

⁷⁶ *Prabodhacandrodaya* of Kṛṣṇamitra (Bombay: Nirṇaya Sāgara Press, 1898); III.18.

⁷⁷ *Nāradaśmṛti* [*The Institutes of Nārada*], with the commentaries of Asaḥāya et al., ed. Julius Jolly (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1885), 12.73–75; *Viṣṇuśmṛti* [*Institutes of Viṣṇu*], ed. Julius Jolly (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1880), 36.7.

⁷⁸ *Yogatattva* 59, ff.; cited by Eliade, *op. cit.* (n. 63 above), p. 129.

⁷⁹ *Kāmasūtra* of Vatsyāyana (2 vols.; Bombay: Venkaṭeśvara, 1856), 7.2.55–57.

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couple engaged in the sexual act while both have their legs folded in the yogic "lotus seat";⁸⁰ in the philosophy of Tantric yoga, even the solitary meditation of the yogi in the lotus seat produced an internal sexual experience, the union of Śiva and the goddess Kuṇḍalinī within the yogi's body: "The *maithuna* [intercourse] of this divine couple produces amṛita [the elixir of immortality], which overflows the yogin's body and bestows on him a state of supreme bliss."⁸¹

Ascetics appear throughout Hindu mythology in creative and erotic roles. When Brahmā wishes to create the worlds, he procures as his wife the female ascetic Śatarūpā and engages in intercourse with her;⁸² her yoga is her creative power. The women of the Pine Forest use their *tapas* as an erotic power, for when they are overcome with passion for Śiva they say, "You must consent to our desires, for we are female ascetics and we do what we wish, whether we are naked or clothed."⁸³ In the Hindu lawbooks, a *brahmacārīn* or ascetic, in the sense of one who has completed a vow of chastity, is said to be a particularly suitable bridegroom.⁸⁴

The paradox only arises when sexual powers are actually used by a man who is supposedly practicing chastity *at that time*, as in the Khajuraho sculptures or in the character of Śiva, simultaneously yogi and priapic god. Various solutions are offered on various levels: Hindu society divided the life-span into separate ages with a type of sexual activity appropriate to each; Śaiva mythology substitutes for this the principle of cycles alternating in a manner roughly parallel to the different "ages"; another solution, applied in the mythology to common yogis as well as to Śiva himself, is to allow the ascetic to make use of his powers in various ways other than by the actual sexual act which constitutes the technical breaking of his vow. These solutions, none of them entirely satisfactory, will be discussed at length below.††

6. SEXUAL PLEASURES AS THE REWARD FOR ASCETICISM

One example of the division into temporal cycles is the belief that the yogi gains by his chastity not only sexual powers but the right

⁸⁰ Anand, *op. cit.* (n. 44 above), Pl. xxxvi, entitled "A Yogic posture of the Kaula cult."

⁸¹ F. D. K. Bosch, *The Golden Germ: An Introduction to Indian Symbolism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1960), p. 91; cf. Anand, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁸² *Śiva* 2.1.16.12.

⁸³ *Śiva*, Dharmasamhitā 10.126.

⁸⁴ Baudhāyana, cited in the *Saṃskāraprakāśa* of the *Viramitrodaya* of Mitra Miśra (Benares: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series #139, 1913), p. 755; and *Liṅga Purāṇa*, cited *ibid.*, p. 752.

†† See below, Sections C and D; also Section H 2-4 and Section I (Part II).

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to use them ; Agastya wins Lopāmudrā by means of the threat of his *tapas*, a force which he also uses to satisfy the conditions under which she will allow him to enjoy her. Śiva says to Pārvatī, “By *tapas* one wins *kāma*,”⁸⁵ and this concept appears often in passages encouraging the practice of *tapas*. The belief that beautiful women await one in heaven is old ; a funeral hymn of the Atharva Veda beseeches the funeral fire not to burn up the phallus of the dead man, for this reason.⁸⁶ The *apsaras*-es, celestial prostitutes, are the particular reward of the ascetic, just as their earthly counterparts are his frequent temptation in mortal life. The *apsaras* Ūrvasī says to Arjuna, “All the men of Pūru’s race that come here delight us through their ascetic merit, and they do not transgress by this.”⁸⁷ The theme is popular in court poetry :

His culminating fruit
of no little asceticism in past lives is this :
that after showing all her charms
in a hundred motions taught by love,
a fair one lies now in his loving arms,
the seal of sleep upon her loosened limbs.⁸⁸

The temporal division in this is clear : sensual pleasures follow asceticism. The other phase of the cycle appears in the concept of *tapas* as expiation for sexual transgressions and as a means to restore sexual powers. §§

But often the erotic and ascetic experiences are in fact considered simultaneously. The structure of Sanskrit and the conventions of Sanskrit verse are such that large elements of a poem, and indeed whole poems, may be construed in either of two entirely different ways. One such punning verse may be read in either the ascetic mode [*śānta*] or the erotic mode [*śṛṅgāra*] :

Ascetic : Do *tapas* somewhere on the sandy bank of the Narmadā river,
O you whose heart is peaceful, confident one, firm one.
What other action is there that brings a blessing in this world,
than to unite with the highest Self ?

Erotic : In summer, when my heart is stirred and emboldened,
I pursue a play-mate and enjoy the lust of love.
What other action is there that brings pleasure in this world,
than to unite with another man’s wife ?⁸⁹

⁸⁵ *Skanda* 6.257.11.

⁸⁶ Atharva Veda IV.34.2.

⁸⁷ MHB III, Appendix 1, #6, 120–21.

⁸⁸ *Subhāṣitaratnaśoṣa* #562 ; cf. #565 ; cf. also Bhartṛhari *Śatakatrayam*, ed. D. D. Kosambi [*The Epigrams Attributed to Bhartṛhari*] (Bombay : Singhi Jain Series #23, 1948), #136.

§§ See Sections I and I 1 (Part II).

⁸⁹ *Rasikarāñjana* of Rāmacandra [*Rāmacandra’s Ergötzen der Kenner*], ed. Richard Schmidt (Stuttgart : W. Kohlhammer, 1896), #9.

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The spirit of this verse is hardly devotional, and it brings up the question of the intention behind the myths of the seduced ascetic. The poet Bhartṛhari cast aspersions on the concept of *apsaras*-es won by asceticism :

You cheat yourself and others with your lies,
Philosopher, so foolish-wise,
In that you state
A celibate
Has greater grace to win the prize.
Are there not heavenly nymphs beyond the skies ?⁹⁰

It should be evident that there is a serious and ancient tradition for ascetic practices to culminate in erotic rewards, but there are also many myths in which the aroused ascetic is simply a dirty old man to be mocked ; when the ascetic himself is the active party in the seduction, as in the *Mahābhārata* tale of Agastya, the myth often shades off into a closely related folk theme : the false ascetic who uses his *tapas* as a pretext with which to obtain lustful rewards.

7. THE HYPOCRITICAL ASCETIC

The jurist Āpastamba remarked, "The billy-goat and a Brahmin learned in the Vedas are the lowliest of all beings."⁹¹ This opinion was shared by Buddhists and Europeans⁹² and prevails to the present day in India.⁹³ Śaiva ascetics in particular are depicted as "foolish, illiterate, voracious, lecherous, and scoundrelly";⁹⁴ Mahendravarman's *Mattavilāsa* ("The Madman's Dalliance")⁹⁵ is a lengthy satire on the excesses committed by Śaiva ascetics, and tales of this type abound in Indian literature.⁹⁶ The philosophical basis for the sexuality of yogis does not automatically justify

⁹⁰ Bhartṛhari #120; trans. by John Brough, in *Poems from the Sanskrit* (London : Penguin, 1968), #9.

⁹¹ Āpastamba 2.6.14.13.

⁹² *Majjhima Nikāya*, Cūladhammasamādānasutta (Pali Text Society; London : V. Trenckner, 1888), vol. I, pp. 305-06; Dubois, *op. cit.*, pp. 592-94; Meyer, *op. cit.* (n. 61 above), p. 160.

⁹³ P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra* (Government Oriental Series B 6; Poona : Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1930-62), V, II, 1094; Nirad Chaudhuri, *The Continent of Circe: An Essay on the Peoples of India* (London : Chatto and Windus, 1965), pp. 192, 203; Eric Newby, *Slowly Down the Ganges* (New York : Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), pp. 228-32.

⁹⁴ Maurice Bloomfield, "On False Ascetics and Nuns in Hindu Fiction," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* XLIV (1924), p. 204.

⁹⁵ *Mattavilāsaprahasana* of Mahendravarman, ed. T. Gaṇapati Sāstri (Trivandrum Sanskrit Series #50; Trivandrum : Superintendent Government Press, 1917).

⁹⁶ *Kathākośa* [*The Kathākośa or Treasury of Stories*], trans. C. H. Tawney (London : Royal Asiatic Society, 1895), pp. 130-35; *Prabodhacandrodāya* III.19; *Kathāsaritsāgara* 3.1.30-54; 15.30; 24.83; 121.3; *Ten Tales from the Tantrapākhyaṇa*, ed. George T. Artola, *Adyar Library Bulletin*, XXIX, 1-4; #1.

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every breach of the vow of chastity; the Bengali saint Caitanya remarked: "I can never again look upon the face of an ascetic who has had anything to do with a woman. The senses are weak, and are attracted toward worldly things; even a wooden image of a woman can steal the mind of a sage. . . . Those false ascetics are contemptible."⁹⁷

This is clearly based on a feeling quite opposed to the satirical spirit of the literary condemnations; as a *true* ascetic, one who knows the ideal, Caitanya objects to the charlatans who give them all a bad name. This attitude underlies many versions of the Pine Forest myth: Śiva, the true ascetic, exposes the weakness of those ascetics who pretend to imitate him but who lust for their wives and are not truly dedicated.⁹⁸ Yet Śiva himself is often pictured as a hypocritical ascetic. The Pine Forest sages actually call him a false ascetic,⁹⁹ an accusation substantiated by the accompanying description:

When Śiva failed to be satisfied by making love to Pārvatī, he then went naked into the Pine Forest in the guise of a madman, his *liṅga* erect, his mind full of desire, wishing to obtain sexual pleasure with the wives of the sages.¹⁰⁰

Śiva himself confesses to being a false ascetic when he replies to the taunts of the sages' wives:

The women: "You are the foremost of wantons; how can you wander begging without embarrassment?"

Śiva: "There is no expedient but wandering as a beggar in order to reveal my own songs, gazes, and words among women in different places."¹⁰¹

In a story of one of the many quarrels between Śiva and Pārvatī, she accuses him of ascetic hypocrisy:

Śiva and Pārvatī were playing at dice, and she won from him all his ornaments and even his loincloth. Then all the hosts and attendants were embarrassed and turned their heads away, and Śiva was ashamed and angry. He said to her, "All the sages and gods are laughing at me; why have you done this? If you have won, at least let me keep my loincloth." But Pārvatī laughed and said, "What need have you for a loincloth? You went naked into the Pine Forest and seduced the wives of the sages, with the pretext of begging; and then when you had gone they gave you great honor. The sages there caused your loincloth to fall; therefore you must cast it off now, for you have lost it at dice anyway."¹⁰²

⁹⁷ *Caitanya Carita Antya* 2.116–18; trans. Dimock, *op. cit.* (n. 63 above), p. 45.

⁹⁸ *Haracaritacintāmaṇi* 10.3–32; *Yāgisvaramāhātmya* 27b.10; *Vāmana* 43–44; *Darpadalana* 7.17–71; *Saura* 69.

⁹⁹ *Śiva*, *Dharmasaṃhitā* 10.187.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.78–80.

¹⁰¹ *Utpreṣṣavallabha*, *Bhikṣāṇakāvyā* (Bombay: Kāvyaṃālā Series #12, 1895) 9.13.

¹⁰² *Skanda* 1.1.34.116–30.

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Śiva's role of the false ascetic in the Pine Forest is supported by various other stories in which he behaves similarly.

Once, Śiva saw some beautiful women and *apsaras*-es and was overcome by desire for them. He invited them to go far away in the sky with him. Pretending to do *tapas*, the god in fact intended to make love to them.¹⁰³

The god may use his real asceticism as a false pretext—even to achieve a goal to which his asceticism legitimately entitles him.

This confusion is due to the ambivalent attitude toward asceticism in Hindu society; although from the time of the Upaniṣads much lip service was paid to the ascetic, a large branch of conventional Hinduism always maintained a very real hostility toward renunciation. The Śaiva ascetic was considered a despiser of Vedic rites and religious institutions,¹⁰⁴ and his mere existence was a slur upon the conventional society which he rejected. The non-Vedic Vṛātya ascetic was classed with the dregs of society, such as incendiaries, poisoners, pimps, spies, adulterers, abortionists, atheists, and drunkards.¹⁰⁵ Fringe members of society could find a comparatively respectable status among the Śaiva sects; this led to a general decline in the moral reputation of Śaivas.¹⁰⁶ Ascetics were frequently employed as spies, and spies masqueraded as ascetics,¹⁰⁷ giving them all a bad name; by extension, Śiva himself was eventually condemned as the author of their rites. In this manner, Śiva derived his reputation as a great smoker of Bhang (marijuana) from the yogis, who to this day are said to indulge in the use of drugs.¹⁰⁸

8. THE IMPORTANCE OF PROCREATION

The most frequent and compelling objection to asceticism is based upon its conflict with the deep-seated Hindu belief in the importance of descendants, a belief central to Indian thought from the time of the Vedas to the present day. The Vedas certainly did not revere celibacy;¹⁰⁹ Lopāmudrā summed up Vedic opinion when

¹⁰³ *Padma* 5.53.1–2.

¹⁰⁴ C. V. Narayan Ayyar, *Origin and Early History of Śaivism in South India* (Madras: University of Madras Press, 1936), p. 16.

¹⁰⁵ MHB V.35.39–41.

¹⁰⁶ Ayyar, *op. cit.*, pp. 62–63.

¹⁰⁷ *Arthaśāstra* 1.11.13–20; 2.35.13; etc.

¹⁰⁸ Elwin, *op. cit.* (n. 45 above), p. 481; Dinesh Chandra Sen, *History of Bengali Language and Literature* (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1911), pp. 242–43; *Padma Purāṇ* of Bijay Gupta, ed. B. K. Bhattacharya and Barisal, p. 226, cited by Pradyot Kumar Maity, *Historical Studies in the Cult of the Goddess Manasā* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1966), p. 189; P. Thomas, *Kama Kalpa: The Hindu Ritual of Love* (11th ed.; Bombay: D. B. Taraporevala, 1959), p. 118; W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic* (2d ed.; London: Thacker and Spink, 1882), p. 273; Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

¹⁰⁹ Maganlal A. Buch, *The Principles of Hindu Ethics* (Baroda, 1921), p. 3.

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she said, "Men should go to their wives." This injunction was elaborated by the time of the Epic in the form of the *ṛtugamana*, the duty of a man to make love to his wife during her fertile period.¹¹⁰ By ignoring the fertile period, a man commits a sin which leads him to Hell;¹¹¹ it is the ancestors' request for descendants which causes Agastya to seek the hand of Lopāmudrā. To this day, it is believed in India that a man who dies childless will become a ghost,¹¹² for a son is responsible for the ceremonies upon which the peace of his dead ancestors depends.

The basic obligation to the manes is cited by Śiva as an excuse for him *not* to beget a son, as he is immortal and has no ancestors,¹¹³ but this is one of many instances in which the god willingly submits to the mortal situation. The *Śiva Purāṇa* says, "The man without a son has an empty house, and his *tapas* is cut off,"¹¹⁴ thus denying to the ascetic both the pleasures which he has voluntarily abandoned and the very goal for which he has sacrificed them. This may seem merely spiteful, but its application in several myths reveals the logic of it in Indian terms:

The sage Mandapāla followed the path of the sages who have drawn up their seed in chastity; he practised *tapas*, conquered his senses, and finally abandoned his body and went to the world of the manes. But there he did not receive the fruits of his *tapas*, and he saw many people without rewards there, though they had mastered asceticism. He asked the reason for this and was told, "Men win these fruits by performing the rituals, mastering *brahmacarya*, and begetting progeny. If a man has mastered *tapas* and performed the rituals, but has no children, he does not obtain the reward; but beget children and you will enjoy the eternal fruits." Upon hearing this, Mandapāla, knowing the fecundity of birds, immediately went and begat four sons upon a bird-woman, Jaritā. Then he abandoned them and took another wife, Lapitā, on whom he begat many sons. In time he returned to Jaritā, and, though both wives were jealous, he lived with them and with his many sons.¹¹⁵

In this myth, chastity is not in itself considered bad, but merely insufficient; the ascetic takes pains to remedy the deficiency and reaps the promised reward in the end, though he experiences many of the problems typical of the attempt to combine the ascetic life with marriage—quarrels with his wife and the loss of his sons. Similar stories are told of other sages;¹¹⁶ the ascetic Prajāpati

¹¹⁰ *Mānavadharmasāstra*, ed. Julius Jolly (London: Trübner, 1887), 3.46–48.

¹¹¹ *Mārkaṇḍeya* 14.4.

¹¹² William Crooke, *The Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (2d ed.; 2 vols.; London, Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1896), II, 22.

¹¹³ *Brhaddharma* 2.60.10–15.

|| See Section H 2 (Part II).

¹¹⁴ *Śiva* 3.14.32.

¹¹⁵ MHB I.220.5–17; .224.1–32.

¹¹⁶ *Devibhāgavata* 1.1.4 ff.; *Brahma* 34.62–73; MHB I.41.1–30; I.42.1–20.

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(primeval creator) named Ruci was begged by his ancestors to marry, but he preferred detachment and retirement from worldly actions. Convinced at length, he did *tapas*, obtained an *apsaras* for his wife, and begat a son upon her.¹¹⁷ Even though Ruci agrees to marry, he obtains his wife by the very method that endangered his ancestors—by the practice of *tapas*—and his wife is the traditional partner of those ascetics who for any reason break their vow of chastity: she is an *apsaras*. Thus Ruci manages to satisfy both traditions somewhat, to beget a son and still remain an ascetic.

9. THE PRAJĀPATI AND HIS ASCETIC SONS

An important series of myths dealing with primeval creation rejects *tapas* as a creative method, but even in this context, the one who makes creation ultimately possible is Śiva, the lord of ascetics, who usually appears in his anti-ascetic, androgynous form, even though his appearance is a reward for Prajāpati's *tapas*:

Brahmā created many creatures; when they failed to increase and Brahmā began to worry, a voice said, "You must create by means of sexual intercourse." But as Śiva had not yet created the race of women, this was not possible. Then Brahmā performed *tapas*, and Śiva came to him in his androgynous form; the woman then became separate and gave Brahmā a *śakti* [female creative power]. She herself re-entered Śiva's body and disappeared; Brahmā was very happy, and creation proceeded by intercourse.¹¹⁸

In another version of this myth, the woman is considered to be Brahmā's daughter, with whom he commits incest, and the man is not Śiva but Kāma. The pattern of the myth allows for the assistance of either the great yogi (who here appears in his sexual aspect) or the great god of desire (to assist Brahmā who in this case is himself considered the great yogi) in order to strike the balance of creative forces:

Once when Brahmā wished to create he brought forth sons mentally. He told them to perform creation, but they disregarded their father's commands and went to do *tapas*. Then in anger Brahmā, the great yogi, created the eleven Rudras [forms of Śiva] and more sons, and then he created a son, Kāma, and a beautiful daughter, sixteen years old. Brahmā said to Kāma, "I have made you for the sake of the pleasure of a man and a woman. Invade the hearts of all creatures by means of yoga, and you will delude and madden them always." Having given magic arrows to Kāma, Brahmā looked at his daughter to give her a boon, but at this moment Kāma

¹¹⁷ *Mārkaṇḍeya* 92.1–26; 93.1–48; 94.1–38; 95.1–7.

¹¹⁸ *Śiva* 3.3.1–29; *Śiva*, *Vāyaviyasaṃhitā* 7.15.–7.17; *Vāyu* 1.9.61–86; *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (Gorakhpur: Gītā Press, 1962), 1.7.1–19; *Padma* 5.3.155–72; *Mārkaṇḍeya* 47.1–17; cf. Dessigane, *Les Legendes*, #63, pp. 82–83.

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decided to test his weapons, and he pierced the great yogi with his arrows and incantations, so that Brahmā fell in a faint. When he regained consciousness and saw his daughter before him, Brahmā was determined to enjoy her, and he began to pursue her. She sought refuge with her brothers, the ascetics, who spoke angrily to their father, saying, "What is this disgusting act that you are bent upon, wishing to enjoy your own daughter?" Then Brahmā was so ashamed that he abandoned his body by means of yoga, and the girl, seeing her father dead, wept and killed herself as he had. But Viṣṇu then appeared and revived them both, giving the girl in marriage to Kāma, to become Rati, goddess of sexual pleasure.¹¹⁹

In this version, the "Rati" which was merely an activity in the earlier version is personified as a goddess, the wife of Kāma, just as Kāma himself appears in place of generalized sexual intercourse. Brahmā dies and is revived by Viṣṇu, a pattern typical of creator gods; in other versions of this story it is Śiva who revives him,¹²⁰ but here Śiva's place is taken by Viṣṇu because Śiva himself is represented both by "the great yogi" (Brahmā) who is shot by Kāma (as Śiva is shot later in the myth) and by the ascetic sons who revile Brahmā for his act of incest as Śiva usually does.##

In another version of this creation myth, which incorporates the first story, Śiva appears more explicitly in a double capacity of yogi and erotic god:

Brahmā began creation by meditation, but darkness and delusion overcame him. His mindborn sons were all yogis, passionless, devoted to Śiva, but they did not want to create. So Brahmā did *tapas* in order to create, but he did not succeed. . . . He begged Śiva to help him in the work of creation. Śiva agreed, but the creatures that he made were immortals like himself, and they filled the universe. Brahmā said, "Do not create this sort of creatures, but make them subject to death." Śiva said, "I will not do that; create such mortals yourself, if you wish." Then Śiva turned away from creation and remained with his seed drawn up in chastity from that day forth.

Brahmā then wished to create by means of sexual intercourse; he did *tapas* for Śiva, who appeared in his androgynous form and gave Brahmā the *śakti*.

Brahmā then began the process of creation by intercourse. He divided himself into a man and a woman; the woman was Śatarūpā and the man was Manu. Śatarūpā did *tapas* and obtained Manu for her husband. Together they begat the race of mortals.¹²¹

Most of the creative themes are here: The yogi Śiva appears as the object of the *tapas* of the sages and of Brahmā and as the god who refuses to create, maintaining his chastity; but as the erotic god, Śiva neglects to reward the ascetic sons, and he himself appears as the androgyne and produces creatures who fill the

¹¹⁹ *Brahmavaivarta* 4.35.31-73, -101-02.

¹²⁰ *Vāyu* 1.25.6 ff.; *Līṅga* 1.22.17 ff.; *Kūrma* 1.10.17-39.

See Section F 1 (Part II).

¹²¹ *Śiva* 7.1.12.1-2, -19-22, -44-47; 7.1.14.14-21; 7.1.17.1-5 ff.

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universe. Creative methods alternate similarly, intercourse replacing *tapas* and being replaced in turn; the final creation is by a combination of the methods: Śatarūpā first uses *tapas* to obtain her husband and then procreates sexually with him.

10. THE TWO FORMS OF IMMORTALITY

Throughout the mythology, whether or not *tapas* is accepted as a valid means of creation, it is practiced for another goal: immortality, freedom from rebirth. In the Vedas, *tapas* is able to accomplish the chief desideratum, fertility; in the Upaniṣads, *tapas* is the means to the new goal, release (*mokṣa* or *mukṭi*). Both are forms of immortality, both promising continuation of the soul without the body—*mokṣa* giving complete freedom of the soul (or absorption into the Godhead), progeny giving a continuation of the soul's life in the bodies of one's children. Thus from the earliest times there was a choice set before the worshiper; even in the hymn of Agastya and Lopāmudrā, the poet speaks of the goal which is won by both paths, and the Purāṇic myths may be read as an attempt to reap the rewards of both worlds in this way.

One passage in Āpastamba praises chastity as the way to immortality,¹²² but another states, "You create progeny and that's your immortality, O mortal."¹²³ If one cannot have it both ways, one can at least succeed by the path particularly suited to the individual; the poet Bhartṛhari expressed this view:

In this vain fleeting universe, a man
Of wisdom has two courses: first, he can
Direct his time to pray, to save his soul,
And wallow in religion's nectar bowl.
But, if he cannot, it is surely best
To touch and hold a lovely woman's breast,
And to caress her warm round hips, and thighs,
And to possess that which between them lies.¹²⁴

The choice is not always so free; one is limited by natural propensities and *svadharma*, the individual's particular place in Hindu society. The god Indra was once enlightened by Śiva and left his wife in order to devote himself to *tapas*; his wife, Śaci, at length persuaded him to return to her and to rule his kingdom, in order to fulfil his own role, his *svadharma* as king of the gods.¹²⁵

¹²² Āpastamba 2.9.23.4.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 2.9.24.1.

¹²⁴ Bhartṛhari #88, trans. Brough, *op. cit.* (n. 90 above), #167; cf. Bhartṛhari #135.

¹²⁵ *Brahmavaivarta* 4.47.152–60.

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In discussing this myth, Heinrich Zimmer wrote of "the re-establishment of a balance. . . . We are also taught to esteem the transient sphere of the duties and pleasures of individual existence, which is as real and vital to the living man as a dream to the sleeping soul."¹²⁶ It is the function of Indra—and of Śiva—to maintain this balance, to defend the fulness of life against the negation of metaphysical emptiness.

In the myths, this balance is expressed, not in a static form, but in a constantly shifting adjustment, mingling elements of the ascetic and conventional traditions in ever narrowing contrasts, approaching but never quite reaching a solution. The *Śiva Purāṇa* sums up in metaphorical terms the resolution of the two paths and the two goals, the yogic fire and the elixir of love: "He who burns his body with the fire of Śiva and floods it with the elixir of his *śakti* by the path of yoga—he gains immortality."¹²⁷

C. ASCETICISM AND FERTILITY IN THE CLASSICAL HINDU SOCIAL SYSTEM

The tension which is manifested in metaphysical terms as the conflict between the two paths to immortality, between *mokṣa* and the *dharma* of conventional society (in particular, the *dharma* of marriage and procreation), appears in social terms as the tension between the different stages (*āśrama*-s) of Hindu life. These four stages provide a superficial solution in temporal terms: first one should be a *brahmacārīn* (chaste student); then *gṛhastha* (married householder); then *vānaprastha* (the man who dwells in the forest with or without his wife); and finally the *sannyāsīn* (the ascetic who has renounced everything). There is little disagreement about the value of the first stage, for it does not preclude any of the others; the peculiar nature of the third stage will be discussed below.*** The basic conflict remains between the second and fourth stages, the householder and the ascetic, who represent the two basic paths.

1. THE ATTEMPT TO RECONCILE THE HOUSEHOLDER AND THE ASCETIC

In praising the ascetic life, the Upaniṣads condemn the values of the householder: One must overcome the desire for sons and live as a mendicant.¹²⁸ This is the ascetic "party line," a direct contra-

¹²⁶ Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (Bollingen Series #6; New York: Pantheon, 1946), p. 22.

¹²⁷ *Śiva* 7.1.28.19.

*** See below, Section C 2; also see Section H 1 (Part II).

¹²⁸ *Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad* 3.5 and 4.4.22.

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diction of the conventional religious view represented by such stories as the *Mahābhārata* tale of Sudarśana, who became a householder, thinking, "As a householder I will conquer death."¹²⁹ According to the lawbooks, which represent primarily the conventional ethics, a man has three debts to pay: He owes sacrifice to the gods, children to his ancestors, and the study of the Vedas to the holy sages; if he does not pay these debts and seeks Release instead, he is condemned to Hell.¹³⁰

The mainstream of Hinduism attempted to reassure the members of each group that by fulfilling the *dharma* of that group—necessary for the survival of the system as a whole—they would still be able to reap the rewards of other groups as well. The jurists incorporated the ascetic "heresy" and added its goals to those of the conventional life. The Epics state that a married man may comply perfectly with the laws of chastity by abstaining from intercourse with his wife except during her fertile season; by this he gains the merits of a true *brahmacārin*.¹³¹ A similar equation appears in another lawbook: "The begetting of a son by the husband is [equivalent to] the experience of the forest-dweller stage."¹³² In this way, the values of asceticism were absorbed into conventional society.

At the other end of the spectrum, the yogi could extend his worldly involvement almost limitlessly without renouncing any aspect of the ascetic life. The self-controlled yogi may even be a householder and still attain Release if he remains unattached to household affairs;¹³³ the intention is all-important in this context. Thus Brahmā says to the Pine Forest sages, "You live in a hermitage but you are overcome by anger and lust; yet the true hermitage of a wise man is his home, while for the man who is not a true yogi even the hermitage is merely a house."¹³⁴ And this is the philosophy behind much of the Tantric sexuality of the later Purāṇas: one may perform the *act* of sexual intercourse without losing one's purity, as long as the *mind* remains uninvolved.†††

Thus the two kinds of thought may meet on either side of the line—the householder may embrace the philosophy and even the

¹²⁹ MHB XIII.2.39–40.

¹³⁰ *Vāsiṣṭhadharmaśāstra*, ed. Alois Anton Führer (Bombay: Bombay Sanskrit Series #23, 1883), 11.48; Manu 4.257, 6.33–37; cf. *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 6.3.10.5 and *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.7.2.1–6.

¹³¹ MHB XII.214.10; III.199.12; cf. *Rāmāyaṇa* I.8.9.

¹³² *Smṛtyarthaśāra*, p. 2, v. 17, cited by Kane, *op. cit.* (n. 93 above), II, 929.

¹³³ *Śiva Saṃhitā*, last 3 verses; cited by Briggs, *op. cit.* (n. 63 above), p. 49.

¹³⁴ *Vāmana* 43.87.

††† See below, Section D 3.

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chastity of the ascetic, or the ascetic may go so far as to take a wife and become a householder.¹³⁵ The same text which teaches a man that he must overcome the desire for sons and become a sage goes on to say that before attaining final Release he must also overcome the desire to be a sage.¹³⁶ Similarly, one must absorb the wisdom of both desires; the ideal for Hinduism in general was a fully integrated life in which all aspects of human nature could be of value.¹³⁷

2. THE FOREST-DWELLER: AN INADEQUATE COMPROMISE

The third stage, that of the forest-dweller, is the most complex, for it is here that the two traditions meet, in the married ascetic. The main factor distinguishing the forest-dweller from the *sannyāsin* was that the former was allowed to have a wife; to counteract this, the forest-dwellers were said to practice a more violent kind of *tapas*, where the *sannyāsin*-s could, if they wished, merely practice restraint.¹³⁸ Yet even here there is some confusion, for some lawbooks grant the forest-dweller the alternative of leaving his wife to the care of his sons.¹³⁹ The textbooks are unanimous, however, in their belief that it was *better* to go into the forest without a wife.¹⁴⁰ Even if the sage does take his wife with him, he is advised to avoid her as much as possible, or, in the words of the Abbé Dubois, "to use the privileges of marriage with the greatest moderation."¹⁴¹ Several lawbooks state that the forest-dweller should live in complete continence, with his seed drawn up;¹⁴² if he has intercourse with his wife, due to his desire, his vow is ruined and he must perform expiation.¹⁴³ The jurist Kullūka allowed the forest-dweller to go to his wife "at the prescribed times," that is, during her fertile period;¹⁴⁴ this is a dispensation similar to that allowed to the householder.

This is a delicate compromise, and one which the mythology

¹³⁵ Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

¹³⁶ *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 3.5.

¹³⁷ Jan Gonda, *Die Religionen Indiens. I: Veda und älterer Hinduismus* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1963), p. 288.

¹³⁸ Kane, *op. cit.*, II, 928-29.

¹³⁹ Manu 6.2-3; *Kūrma* 2.27.1-17; *Vaikhānasasmārtasūtram*, ed. by W. Caland (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1927), 9.5; cf. Kane, *op. cit.*, II, 918.

¹⁴⁰ D. R. Bhandarkar, "Lakulīṣa," pp. 189-190; Guṇaratna's commentary on Haribhadra's *Śaṅḍarśanasamuccaya*, cited by Surendranath Das Gupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy: V: Southern Schools of Śaivism* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 144.

¹⁴¹ Dubois, *op. cit.*, pp. 505 and 508.

¹⁴² *Yājñavalkyasmṛiti* (Poona: Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series #46, 1904), 3.44; *Vāsiṣṭha* 9.5; Manu 6.26; *Vaikhānasasmārtasūtram* 9.2-5.

¹⁴³ *Kūrma* 2.27.16-17.

¹⁴⁴ Cited by Kane, *op. cit.*, II, 920.

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never accepted. Physical chastity can be regulated, but in this realm it is the elusive chastity of the mind that is put to the test. A famous and typical story illustrating this problem is the tale of Jamadagni :

The ascetic Jamadagni did *tapas* for many years; then, by the gods' command, he went to the king and asked for the hand of the princess Reṇukā in marriage. Having obtained her, he went back to his hermitage with her and they performed *tapas* together for many years, during which five sons were born to them. One day when the sons were out gathering fruit, Reṇukā went to bathe, and in the river she saw a king sporting with his wife. Then Reṇukā was overcome with desire for him, and because of that transgression she fainted. She recovered and returned to the hermitage, but as soon as her husband saw her, devoid of her holy luster, he knew that she had lost her virtue. He was furious, and when he had reviled her he asked each of his sons in turn to kill her; the first four refused, but the youngest, Rāma, took an axe and killed his mother, for which his father praised him highly, offering him a boon. Rāma asked that his mother be revived, and this was granted.¹⁴⁵

The sin, committed in mind alone, is so slight in proportion to the punishment that, setting aside the possibility that this may be a somewhat Bowdlerized account of Reṇukā's transgression (an unlikely possibility in the light of the Epic's general disinclination to mince words), it seems necessary to seek the true fault in the situation itself; not only in the troublesome presence of the wife, but in the sons as well, whose birth to ascetics is a constant problem in the mythology.

The situation of the married ascetic is one of compromise, and this is never the Hindu way of resolution, which proceeds by a series of oppositions—for example, the yogi and the married man—rather than by one entity which combines the two by sacrificing the essence of each. Hinduism has no "golden mean"; it seeks the exhaustion of two golden extremes, rather than the arbitration of a middle ground. The yogi in myth is very closely bound up with normal existence,¹⁴⁶ but at the same time entirely divorced from it; this made sense to the Hindu in a way that the forest-dweller compromise never did. As a metaphorical mediation, the third stage remained valuable, and so it is the focal point of most of the yogi-householder stories; but as a way of life it was rejected,¹⁴⁷ even forbidden.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ MHB III.116.1–18.

¹⁴⁶ Gonda, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

¹⁴⁷ Louis Dumont, "World Renunciation in Indian Religion," in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, IV (April, 1960), p. 45.

¹⁴⁸ Kane, *op. cit.*, II, 928–29.

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D. SUBLIMATION AND THE TRANTRAS

On the human level, as well as the divine, one solution to the conflict between sexual and ascetic behavior was to equate them completely, playing upon the basic function of power which they do in fact share, qualifying sexual activity in such a way as to make it entirely yogic in its application. This solution underlies the Tantric theory of sublimation, by which desire itself, subjected to ascetic discipline, is used to conquer desire. The conventional ascetic viewpoint opposes the method of sublimation; desire must be conquered by chastity, by firmness, by resistance to temptation; as Śiva himself explains, "The desire for desires is increased rather than assuaged by the enjoyment of them, just as a dark flame is increased by oblations poured upon it."¹⁴⁹ But desire may also be channeled and controlled, not by undisciplined license, but by careful application of sexual stimuli; this is the basis of Tantrism, the influence of which is strong in the later strata of Śaiva mythology.

1. SEXUAL SATIETY: THE "LIṄGA" IN THE "YONI"

When Kāma has aroused Śiva by shooting him with the arrow of Fascination, Śiva resolves to marry Pārvatī in order to cure himself of the disease born of desire;¹⁵⁰ he says, "I burn day and night because of Kāma; I will find no peace [*śanti*] without Pārvatī."¹⁵¹ The particular symbolism which expresses this cure is that of the *liṅga* and the *yoni* (the female sexual organ); although in the myths the origin of *liṅga* worship is sometimes ascribed to a curse, it is more frequently the result of measures taken to cure Śiva of his destructive sexual fever. When the Pine Forest sages castrate Śiva, his fiery *liṅga* moves throughout the earth and the underworld and heaven, burning everything before it like a fire, troubling the universe until the sages propitiate Śiva and Pārvatī agrees to receive the *liṅga* in her *yoni* form.¹⁵² The solution to Śiva's dangerous sexuality is not to impose chastity upon him—as the sages attempt to do, and fail, merely exacerbating the danger—but to satisfy him; in certain extreme situations, the only possible control of desire is release. Lust remains a threat to religion only until it is answered; the Goddess says to Śiva, "My lord, having made love with you for many years, I am satisfied,

¹⁴⁹ *Liṅga* 1.86.23.

¹⁵⁰ *Brahmāṇḍa* 4.30.84.

¹⁵¹ *Mahābhāgavata* 24.33.

¹⁵² Nilakaṇṭha on MHB XIII.14.228–31 (Bombay); *Śiva* 4.12.17–52.

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and your mind has withdrawn from these pleasures. I wish to know your true nature, that frees one from rebirth.”¹⁵³

2. YOGA AND “BHOGA”

The terms yoga and *bhoga* (sexual enjoyment), representing the extremes of the two paths, appear often in Tantric texts :

If a man is a yogi he does not enjoy [sensual pleasures]; while one who enjoys them does not know yoga. That is why the Kaula [Śaiva Tantric] doctrine, containing the essence of *bhoga* and yoga, is superior to all [other doctrines].¹⁵⁴

The Tantra goes on to explain this central doctrine : “In the Kaula doctrine, *bhoga* turns into yoga directly ; what is sin [in conventional religion] becomes meritorious ; *saṃsāra* [worldly life] turns into *mokṣa*.”¹⁵⁵ To a certain extent, this is a simple conjunction of opposites, enhanced by a felicitous assonance (*bhoga*-yoga, *bhokṣa*-*mokṣa*)—the sort of proposition which is not uncommon in the crude system of the Tantras ; but it contains the seed of metaphysical as well as psychological truth, and this is developed in the mythology.

The application of this doctrine to Śiva, the greatest of yogis and the greatest of *bhogin*-s (i.e., those who indulge in sexual enjoyment) is obvious. Śiva is the narrator of most of the Tantras, explaining them to Pārvatī, and he himself is usually regarded as the author of their doctrine.¹⁵⁶ Bhairavānanda, a Śaiva yogi who appears in a play by Rājaśekhara, sings this verse :

Gods Vishnu and Brahm and the others may preach
Of salvation by trance, holy rites and the Vedies.
'Twas Umā's [Pārvatī's] fond lover alone that could teach
Us salvation plus brandy plus fun with the ladies.¹⁵⁷

As propounder of this doctrine, Śiva is also the greatest of its examples. Brahmā cites this in criticism of Śiva when Śiva has censured him for his attempted incest ; Brahmā says that Śiva considers himself to be a wise yogi and a *bhogin* with conquered senses.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ *Śiva* 2.2.23.7-8.

¹⁵⁴ *Kūlārṇava Tantra*, ed. Tārānātha Vidyāratha (Tantric Texts, #5, ed. Arthur Avalon ; Calcutta and London : Luzac, 1917), II.23 ; cf. Dumont, “World Renunciation,” p. 53.

¹⁵⁵ *Kūlārṇava Tantra* II.24 ; cf. *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* of Svātmarāmayogīndra, (Bombay : Bombay Theosophical Publication Fund, 1815), 3.94.

¹⁵⁶ Anand, *op. cit.*, p. 40, citing Arthur Avalon.

¹⁵⁷ *Karpūramañjarī* of Rājaśekhara, ed. Sten Konow, with a trans. by Charles Lanman (Cambridge : Harvard Oriental Series #4, 1901), I.22-24 ; Lanman translation p. 235.

¹⁵⁸ *Śiva* 2.2.10.25.

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3. TEMPTATION AND INDIFFERENCE

It is significant that Śiva, even when a *bhōgin*, has “conquered senses”; this distinguishes him from the mere libertine and justifies his achievement of perfection. *Controlled* release, not complete license, is the Hindu solution to the problem of lust. When this is attained, then the devotee who indulges in sexual pleasures is saved rather than damned by them: “He who thirsts for pleasure in order to enjoy it becomes addicted to desire [*kāmin*]. But the sage who partakes of sensual pleasures as they happen, with a detached mind, without desire, he becomes free of desire [*akāmin*].”¹⁵⁹ This is the justification which Śiva uses frequently in the Purāṇas to retain his status as a yogi while participating in sexual experiences urged upon him by the gods: he does it, but he does not enjoy it. Physical involvement without emotional involvement makes him even a greater yogi than he would be if he merely remained forever in his meditation. For this reason, Śiva is said to have conquered Kāma, not in spite of the fact that Kāma first stirred his senses greatly, but *because* he was greatly aroused.††† By conquering his incipient desire¹⁶⁰—that is, by burning up *his* Kāma—he shows his control.

This kind of self-temptation underlies the episode in which Śiva allows Himālaya to bring Pārvatī to him when he is performing *tapas*; Śiva receives her, not because he is a false ascetic, but because he is so great an ascetic that he is in no danger from women, or so he thinks.

Because of his respect for Himālaya, Śiva accepted his daughter, even though he realized that her beauty was a source of great passion, an obstacle to anyone meditating upon *tapas*. For this is even greater firmness, to be able to remain firm when there is an obstacle; the *tapas* that is done in a place without obstacles is greatly increased when done in a place with obstacles. . . . Śiva received her even though she was an obstacle to his meditation, for those whose minds are not disturbed even when temptation is near—they are truly firm.¹⁶¹

Thus Pārvatī taunts him to prove his invulnerability by exposing himself to her temptation, saying that if he is truly beyond the power of women, he will have nothing to fear from her presence.¹⁶² Similarly, Gorakh Nāth sent Pūran to beg alms from the beautiful

¹⁵⁹ Gopāla Uttara Tāpinī Upaniṣad, 15; in *Vaiṣṇava Upaniṣads*, with the commentary of Śrī Upaniṣad Brahma-yogin, ed. Pandit A. Mahadeva Sastri (Adyar Library Series #8; 2d. ed.; Adyar Library, 1953).

††† See Section G 2–4 (Part II).

¹⁶⁰ Śiva 2.3.18.45.

¹⁶¹ Kālikā 43.35–40; Kumārasambhava 1.56.

¹⁶² Śiva 2.3.13.21.

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Queen, and even to be her slave for four hours, as the test of a true ascetic.¹⁶³

The importance of this kind of temptation has been noted by Edward C. Dimock in the Sāhajiyā sect of Bengal:

It is necessary to transform desire into true love, or *prema*, before ritual union can be effective. And the Sāhajiyās consider that chastity, especially under extreme temptation, has the power to transform desire into love. . . . Desire, called *kāma*, is dangerous only when it is considered as the end. The truth is that *kāma* is the beginning.¹⁶⁴

In physiological terms, the "extreme temptation" is the erotic stimulus that stirs the seed so that it can rise through the spinal cord to the brain.¹⁶⁵ The initial impulse to chastity, which is always visualized as an active state, a method, is a sexual impulse.

4. THE RETENTION OF THE SEED

Eventually, the Tantras refined this doctrine to allow the man who had conquered his desires to perform the sexual act itself, merely retaining his seed to demonstrate the complete control of his senses; this is an extreme variation upon the theme of temptation. The upward motion of the seed—as in the figure of the ithyphallic yogi—represents the channeling of the life forces themselves:

The method of the Guru at this stage is to use the forces of Pravritti (active sexuality) in such a way as to render them self-destructive. The passions which bind (notably the fundamental instincts for food, drink, and sexual satisfaction) may be it is said so employed as to act as forces whereby the particular life, of which they are the strongest physical manifestation, is raised to the universal life. Passion which has hitherto run downwards and outwards (often to waste) is directed inwards and upwards and transformed to power.¹⁶⁶

In order for this ritual to be effective, it was essential that the yogi restrain his seed, for, as Mircea Eliade remarks, "Otherwise the yogin falls under the law of time and death, like any common libertine."¹⁶⁷ In Tantric terms, this is what distinguishes the false

¹⁶³ Cf. *Narottamavilāsa* of Narahari-dāsa, ed. Rāmanārāyaṇa Vidyāratna (Murshidabad, Berhampur: Rādhārāman Press, 1918), pp. 200–01; trans. by Dimock, *op. cit.* (n. 63 above), p. 156; and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Gorakhpur: Gītā Press, 1962), 6.5.41.

¹⁶⁴ Dimock, *op. cit.*, pp. 53, 155, 16 and 157.

¹⁶⁵ P. H. Pott, *Yoga and Yantra: Their Interrelationship and their Significance for Indian Archeology*, trans. Rodney Needham (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), p. 8; *Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad* 6.4.5; *Yü-fang chih-yao* I b, trans. Henri Maspero, in "Les Procédés de 'nourrir le principe vital' dans la religion taoïste ancienne," *Journal Asiatique*, CCXXVII (1937), p. 385.

¹⁶⁶ Sir John George Woodroffe [Arthur Avalon], *Śakti and Śākta: Essays and Addresses on the Śākta Tantraśāstras* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1959), p. 151.

¹⁶⁷ Eliade, *op. cit.*, pp. 267–68.

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ascetic ("any common libertine") from the true yogi, as Śiva insists that he is distinguished from the other targets of Kāma.¹⁶⁸ The seed must be rechanneled, not held motionless; this is in keeping with the mythological concept of power which cannot be destroyed but must be set in motion in a safe direction. Other texts substantiate this idea with descriptions of the control of the seed after it has actually been emitted.¹⁶⁹ In the mythology, this takes the form of numerous incidents in which the seed of the yogi is swallowed, or cast into a sacrificial fire, or disposed of in other unnatural ways, as, for example, Śiva's seed is swallowed by Pārvatī or Agni, or infused into the wives of the Seven Sages.¹⁷⁰

One interesting result of the technique of *coitus reservatus* is that the yogi is able thus to combine the alternating phases of sexuality and chastity just as Śiva does in his symbolic aspects, restoring his spent powers even as he spends them. §§§ Śiva himself is noted for his ability not only to draw up his seed in chastity but to draw it up in sexuality as well, to make love to Pārvatī for many years without shedding his seed.¹⁷¹ Eliade has seen in the technique of seminal retention the attempt to recover the primordial powers that men had before the Light was dominated by Sexuality; by defeating the biological purposes of the sexual act, one ceases to act in instinctual blindness like other animals.¹⁷² The conquest of the biological purpose of the act corresponds to the yogi's conquest of the emotional purpose of the act—that is, desire.

In the mythology of Śiva, the restraint of the seed serves a double purpose; on the one hand, it makes possible the birth of the son needed by the gods, a son who must *not* be born in Pārvatī (because the combination of her great powers with those of Śiva

¹⁶⁸ Śiva 7.1.24.43–45.

¹⁶⁹ *Dyānabindu Upaniṣad* 84–86; *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 6.4.10; *Gorakṣa Saivānta* 70–71, cited by Briggs, *op. cit.*, pp. 298, 333–34; *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 3.82–96; commentary on Kanha, cited by Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 254; Surajit Sinha, "A note on the concept of sexual union for spiritual quest among the Vaiṣṇava preachers in the Bhumi belt of Purulia and Singbhum," *Eastern Anthropologist* XIV #2 (1961), pp. 194–95.

¹⁷⁰ *Āitareya Brāhmaṇa* 13.9; *Brhaddevatā* 5.97; MHB XIII, Appendix 1 #5, 48–50; *Haracaritacintāmaṇi* 9.196; *Kathāsaritsāgara* 3.6.81; *Kumārasambhava* 1.51, 10.54; *Brahmaṇḍa* 3.1.30–40; 4.30.99–100; *Brahmavaivarta* 3.8.19–35, –83–88; 3.9.1–26; *Matsya* 158.33; 159.1; *Padma* 6.12.25; *Līṅga* 1.15.17–19; *Saura* 61.64–70; 62.5–12; *Śiva* 2.4.2.46; *Śiva*, *Dharmasamhitā* 10.132–50; *Skanda* 1.2.29.117–18; 5.1.34.62–66; 6.246.19–20; *Vāmana* 54.45; *Vāyu* 2.4.21–39; Elwin, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

§§§ See Sections I and I 1 (Part II).

¹⁷¹ MHB XIII.83.45–47; *Rāmāyaṇa* I.35.6–13; *Kumārasambhava* 8.8; *Brahmavaivarta* 3.1.22, –40; *Kālikā* 48.46–47; *Śiva* 2.4.1.24; 2.4.2.1; 2.5.22.41–42.

¹⁷² Mircea Eliade, *Mephistopheles and the Androgyne: Studies in Religious Myth and Symbol* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), pp. 42–43.

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would produce a son of unbearable force),||| but who must be inspired, as it were, by Śiva's union with Pārvatī; that is, Śiva must make love to Pārvatī in order to stir the seed up, but he must not place it in her. By separating the functions of eroticism and fertility in this way, the technique of *coitus reservatus* also allows Śiva to maintain his ambivalent status of yogi and lover.¹⁷³

Yet the emphasis on Śiva's restraint of the seed as a justification for his sexual involvement is too simple and cannot be made to bear the burden of the resolution. In the first place, Tantric methods are later than the ambiguous myths of Śiva; and, in the second place, perhaps the most important of all the aspects of Śiva, and one of the oldest, is his role as the giver of the seed, which derives from his early identification with Brahmā and Agni, as well as with Kāma himself. This aspect of the mythology of Śiva will be discussed in the course of the second half of this paper.

||| See Section I 2 (Part II).

¹⁷³ Agrawala, *op. cit.*, vi; Bharati, *op. cit.*, p. 296; Watts, *op. cit.*, p. 96.



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Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty

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PART II

E. THE VEDIC ANTECEDENTS OF ŚIVA

Many of the characteristics which contribute to the apparently paradoxical nature of the Purāṇic Śiva may be traced back to individual characteristics of gods of the Vedic pantheon. Both Śiva and Brahmā derive their creative attributes from the Vedic figure of the Prajāpati, the primeval creator; from Indra, Śiva inherits his phallic and adulterous character; from Agni, the heat of asceticism and passion; and from Rudra he takes a very common epithet as well as certain dark qualities.

1. RUDRA, GOD OF DESTRUCTION

Although an overemphasis on the identity of Rudra and Śiva has led to certain misleading generalizations, there is nevertheless a strong relationship between them. Śiva's paradoxical nature in the Purāṇas is based in part upon the superficially ambiguous nature of Rudra as creator and destroyer, the god with a shining exterior and a dark interior,¹ god of the storm and of healing herbs. Pri-

¹ Ernst Arbmman, *Rudra: Untersuchungen zum altindischen Glauben und Kultus* (Uppsala: Appelbergs Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1922), p. 10.

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marily, however, it is the destructive aspect of Rudra which is bequeathed to Śiva. In the Ṛg Veda, Rudra is invoked as a god of death: "Do not slaughter our father or our mother."² In later metaphysical developments, death becomes less personal, and Śiva destroys the universe by fire at the end of each eon, purifying it by sprinkling it with ashes.³ This cosmic role appears in the later mythology as a kind of necrophilia attributed to Śiva, who frequents funeral grounds smeared with the ashes of corpses,⁴ and even becomes incarnate in a corpse.⁵ This significant aspect of Śiva, together with the name of Rudra which is given to Śiva throughout the Purāṇas, is derived almost entirely from the Vedic Rudra.

2. INDRA, PHALLIC GOD OF FERTILITY

But the other aspect of Śiva, the phallic god, the giver of seed, is not merely an arbitrary philosophical reversal of his destructive role. To a certain extent, his sexuality may be derived from his ancient connection with the ascetic cults and their sexual manifestations, but many of the myths of fertility and much of the phallic religion may be derived from Śiva's close connection with Indra, the Vedic king of the gods.⁶

One tie between Indra and Śiva is formed by the group of the Maruts or Rudras, storm gods. In the Ṛg Veda they are the companions of Indra. Later they are called Indra's brothers, and they are the sons of Rudra,⁷ who, according to one myth, adopted them when Indra tried to kill them in fraternal jealousy.⁸ The two gods share many characteristics: both are said to have three eyes⁹ or a thousand eyes,¹⁰ and for the same reason: "Once the *apsaras* Tilottamā was sent to seduce the demons Sunda and Upasunda

² Ṛg Veda I. 114.7; cf. *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* of the Black Yajur Veda, with the commentary of Mādhava, ed. E. Roer and E. B. Cowell (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1860), 4.5.6.6.

³ *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.27.107-9.

⁴ *Skanda* 1.1.22.53; *Śiva* 2.2.26.15 and 2.3.27.27.

⁵ *Vāyu* 1.23.208-9.

⁶ Walter Ruben, *Kṛṣṇa: Konkordanz und Kommentar der Motive seines Heldenlebens* ("Istanbuler Schriften No. 17" [Istanbul, 1944]), p. 103; Alain Daniélou, *Hindu Polytheism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 107; Allan Dahlquist, *Megasthenes and Indian Religion* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962), pp. 140-41; Horace Hayman Wilson (trans.), *Rig Veda Saṃhitā* (London: Trübner, 1866), I, xxvi-xxvii.

⁷ Arthur Anthony Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology* (Encyclopedia of Indo-Aryan Research, ed. George Bühler, III, I, A [Strassburg: Trübner, 1897]), pp. 79-81.

⁸ Śāyana on Ṛg Veda I.114.6.

⁹ *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* [*Bṛhat Saṃhitā*] of Varāha-mihira, ed. H. Kern (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, New Series, 1865), 58.42-43.

¹⁰ For Rudra: *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* 9.1.1.6-7; for Indra, nn. 12 and 15 below.

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from their *tapas*. While she danced before them, Śiva and Indra wanted to see more of her, and for this purpose Śiva became four-faced and Indra thousand-eyed.”¹¹ In this, as in the myth of Brahmā and his daughter,* the cause and purpose of the extra eyes is a sexual one.¹² Both Indra and Śiva here play the part of the seduced ascetic; both are fertility gods. Indra in the *Mahābhārata* is the god of the seed who dissuades King Uparicara from his *tapas* and teaches him to erect “Indra-poles,”¹³ phallic emblems which are the antecedents of the Śiva-*liṅga*.

With these qualities goes a series of myths that are told about both gods. Like Śiva, Indra is known as an adulterer, famed for the seduction of Ahalyā, the wife of the sage Gautama,¹⁴ a crime for which he is sexually mutilated¹⁵ as Śiva is.¹⁶ One version of the Pine Forest tale refers to the castration of Indra when describing the same fate as it befalls Śiva.¹⁷ Indra is the traditional enemy of ascetics, as is Śiva himself on occasion. The *tapas* of the ascetic threatens the kingdom of Indra, who is himself weakened by his lack of chastity, and Indra seduces the sage’s wife or sends an *apsaras* or even his own wife or daughter to weaken the ascetic and turn him from his *tapas*,† just as Śiva uses his own sexual charms, or those of his wife, to dissuade the Pine Forest sages from their *tapas*.¹⁸ Both gods are associated with anti-Brahmanical, heterodox acts, and each loses his right to a share of the sacrifice.¹⁹ Indra once killed the Brahmin Namuci, and Namuci’s head pur-

¹¹ Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, *Mahābhārata* (hereafter *MHB*), ed. Vishnu S. Sukthankar *et al.* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933), I.203.15–26.

* See below, Section F2.

¹² Indra: *Brahmavaivarta* 4.47.31–34; Śiva: *Skanda* 5.3.150.18, 6.153.2–27.

¹³ *MHB* XII.214.16 and IX.8.21.

¹⁴ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.3.4.18; *MHB* V.12.6, XII.329.4.1, XIII.41.12; *Rāmāyaṇa* I.47.15–32, I.48.1–10; Śiva, *Dharmasamhitā* 11.1–13.

¹⁵ *Śatapatha* 12.7.1.10–12, 5.2.3.8; *Rāmāyaṇa* I.47.26–27, I.48.1–10; *MHB* XII.329.14.1; cf. *Rg Veda* VI.46.3 and VIII.19.32.

¹⁶ Śiva, *Dharmasamhitā* 10.187–93; *Kūrma* 2.38.39–41; *Skanda* 6.1.48–52; *Yāgyavalkya Smṛiti* 26a; *Haracaritacintāmaṇi* 10.71–76.

¹⁷ *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.27.23.

† See Part I, Section B2.

¹⁸ Indra sends Śaci against Nahuṣa: *MHB* V.15.2–25. He uses his daughter, Jayantī, against Śukra: *Matsya* 47.113–27, 47.170–213; *Padma* 5.13.257–313; *Vāyu* 2.35–6. Śiva uses his “wife” against the Pine Forest sages: *Kūrma* 2.38.9–12; *Saura* 69; Śiva, *Dharmasamhitā* 10.108–10; he uses her against the demon Jalandhara: *Padma* 6.3–19, 6.98–107; *Skanda* 2.4.14–22; *Saura* 37.1–32; Śiva 2.5.13–26.

¹⁹ Indra: *Viṣṇu* 4.9.18; Rudra: *Bhāgavata* 4.2.18; Śiva 2.2.26.18. Indra: cf. *Tāṇḍya Mahābrāhmaṇa* with the commentary of Śāyaṇa (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1869–74), 14.11.28.

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sued him until he was purified of his sin,²⁰ just as Śiva, having be-headed Brahmā, was plagued by the skull of Brahmā until he established the vow of expiation.‡

The two gods often impersonate one another, Indra taking the repulsive form of a Śaiva heretic,²¹ Śiva the handsome form of Indra himself.²² Thus each god increases that quality—*tapas* or *kāma*—which already exists within him in subordination to the complementary force. The commentator on the epic remarks that Śiva may assume the epithet of Indra because there is no difference between them;²³ and Indra, trying to dissuade a householder from performing *tapas* for Śiva, says, “Śiva is no different from me.”²⁴ In this context, in this role, there is no difference; Indra and Śiva were not identified with each other because they happened to amass similar characteristics. Rather, from the time of the late Vedas, Rudra and Indra were *given* similar attributes (e.g., the Maruts) because they served an identical function.

3. AGNI, THE EROTIC FIRE

The ascetic Śiva of the Purāṇas frequently uses his *tapas* as a weapon against his enemies, particularly against Kāma. In the R̥g Veda most of the verses in which *tapas* is used as heat against enemies are hymns to Agni, the god of fire,²⁵ who blasts with his *tapas* those who are impious and who perform the ritual with an evil purpose,²⁶ just as Śiva burns the impious Pine Forest sages. The fiery power of *tapas* serves as a natural bridge between the two gods; and it is said, “All the various forms of fire are ascetics [*tapasvin-s*], all takers of vows, and all are known to be parts of Rudra himself.”²⁷

But most of the Śaiva myths are derived from Agni personified not as the heat of *tapas* but as the opposite force, the heat of sexual desire. Many myths are based upon a combination of the

²⁰ *MHB* IX.42.28–36; cf. *MHB* V.9–14, XII.273.26–54; *Hālāsyamāhātmya* No. 1, p. 7; T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography* (2 vols.; Madras: Law Printing House, 1916), II, A, 295–309.

‡ See below, Section F3.

²¹ *Bhāgavata* 4.19.12–20; Edward Washburn Hopkins, *Epic Mythology* (Encyclopedia of Indo-Aryan Research, III, I, B [Strassburg: Trübner, 1915]), p. 137; cf. *MHB* XIV.54.12–35.

²² *MHB* XIII.14.88 ff.; Ruben, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

²³ Nīlakaṇṭha on *MHB* XIII.17.45 (Bombay); XIII.17.44 (Poona).

²⁴ *Śiva* 3.15.39.

²⁵ Chauncey Blair, *Heat in the R̥g Veda and Atharva Veda* (American Oriental Society Publication No. 45 [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961]), p. 83.

²⁶ R̥g Veda VIII.60.16 and 19, III.18.2, X.87.14 and 20, VII.1.7.

²⁷ *Līṅga* 1.6.4.

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two. Springing from the natural physiological analogy, the tie between Agni and *kāma* was supported in Hindu thinking by the identification of ritual heat, *tapas*, with sexual heat, *kāma*.²⁸ A hymn of the Atharva Veda invokes Agni to madden a man with love;²⁹ another text states, "Agni is the cause of sexual union. . . . When a man and woman become heated, the seed flows, and birth takes place."³⁰

As a personified deity, Agni is an unscrupulous seducer of women and an adulterer, qualities which cause him to be identified with Rudra.³¹ When Śiva destroys the triple city of the demons, his weapon is fire, one of his eight forms, and the burning of the demon women is described in erotic terms:

When Śiva burnt the triple city with his fiery arrow, the women were burnt as they made love with their lovers in close embraces. One woman left her lover but could go nowhere else, and she died in front of him. One lotus-eyed woman, weeping, cried, "Agni, I am another man's wife; you, who witness the virtue of the triple world, should not touch me. Go away, leaving this house and my husband who lies with me." . . . Some women were burnt as they ran from their husbands' embraces; others, asleep and intoxicated, exhausted after love-making, were half-burnt before they awoke and wandered about, stunned.³²

Erotic death by fire is frequently associated with the suttee motif; the original "suttee" was Satī, who entered the fire when her husband, Śiva, was dishonored. When Satī, reborn as Pārvatī, was about to marry Śiva again, the women of Himālaya's city admired the bridegroom, who was the personification of death by fire: "They blamed their lovers and praised Śiva, saying, 'What use have we for our lovers, and our nights of love-making? We will not continue on the wheel of life, but we will enter the fire, and Śiva will be our husband.'" ³³

4. AGNI AND THE PINE FOREST SAGES

Śiva is more explicitly related to the erotic, destructive fire in the myth of the Pine Forest, which can be traced directly to the story of Agni and the wives of the Seven Sages, a text which is the source of much of the myth of the birth of Kumāra as well.³⁴ A late Vedic

²⁸ Atharva Veda III.21.4; *Taittiriya Saṃhitā* 2.2.3.1.

²⁹ Atharva Veda VI.130.4.

³⁰ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.4.3.4–5 and 3.5.3.16.

³¹ F. D. K. Bosch, "Het Linga-Heiligdom van Dinaja," *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* (Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences No. LXIV, 1924), p. 249.

³² *Matsya* 140.59–65; *Śiva* 2.5.10.37–38; cf. *Subhāṣitaratnaṣa* Nos. 49, 61, and 67.

³³ *Brahmavaivarta* 4.39.16–21.

³⁴ Bosch, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

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text says, "The waters were the wives of Varuṇa [god of the waters]. Agni desired them and united with them. His seed fell and became the earth, the sky, and the plants that are eaten by fire."³⁵ This statement foreshadows the role of fire and water in the Kumāra story (in which the seed of Śiva is placed first in Agni and then in the Ganges); another version of this story concludes: "Agni's seed fell and became gold,"³⁶ and the seed of Śiva, the source of Kumāra, is gold. §

All later versions describe the seduced women not as the wives of Varuṇa but as the wives of the Seven Sages:

Originally, the Kṛttikās [the Pleiades] were the wives of the Bears [or Stars, the constellation Ursa Major], for the Seven Sages were in former times called the Bears. They were, however, prevented from intercourse [with their husbands], for the latter, the Seven Sages, rise in the North, and they [the Kṛttikās] in the East. Now, it is a misfortune for one to be prevented from intercourse [with his wife]. . . . But in fact Agni is their mate, and it is with Agni that they have intercourse.³⁷

No causal relationship seems to be suggested here between the Kṛttikās' separation from their husbands and their connection with Agni. In many of the later versions, however, it is clearly stated that they were abandoned by their husbands because of their impregnation by Agni (or Śiva),³⁸ and in one version they are cursed to become constellations for this reason.³⁹ Yet in the earliest full version of this story, in the *Mahābhārata*, they are given the *reward* of becoming constellations and dwelling forever in heaven as compensation for having been abandoned by their husbands:

Once when Agni saw the beautiful wives of the great sages sleeping in their hermitage, he was overcome by desire for them. But he reflected, "It is not proper for me to be thus full of lust for the chaste wives of the Brahmins, who are not in love with me." Then he entered the household fire so that he could touch them, as it were, with his flames, but after a long time his desire became still greater, and he went into the forest, resolved to abandon his corporeal form. Then Svāhā [the oblation], the daughter of Dakṣa, fell in love with him and watched him for a long time, seeking some weak point, but in vain. When she knew that he had gone into the forest, full of desire, the amorous goddess decided to take the forms of the wives of the Seven Sages and to seduce Agni; thus both of them would obtain their desire. Assuming the form of each of the wives in turn, she made love with Agni; she took his seed and threw it into a golden lake on the white mountain.

³⁵ *Taittiriya Samhitā* 5.5.4.1.

³⁶ *Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa* 1.1.3.8.

§ See below, Section E5.

³⁷ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 2.1.2.4–5.

³⁸ *Śiva* 2.4.2.62–64; *Skanda* 1.2.29.122.

³⁹ *Skanda* 1.1.27.75.

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The seed generated a son, Kumāra; the sages' wives, who were abandoned by their husbands, came to Kumāra and begged him to let them dwell forever in heaven. By his grace, they became the constellation of the Kṛttikās, considered the mothers of Kumāra. Then Svāhā married Agni.⁴⁰

The elemental Agni, as well as the anthropomorphic, is very much in evidence here. He comes to the sages' wives in the form of the household fire, and, when spurned, he withdraws his elemental form as Śiva does in the Pine Forest, causing darkness to spread throughout the universe.⁴¹ Agni's wife, Svāhā, is merely the personification of the oblation, the natural partner of the sacrificial fire; and she is the daughter of Dakṣa, like Satī, who makes herself an oblation, a suttee. Later versions of the Pine Forest myth simply transfer from Agni to Śiva more and more of the attributes which they share, using the basic plot and characters to point new morals, maintaining even—or rather, especially—the ambiguous elements. Thus the (false?) ascetic (Agni-Śiva) desires the wives of the great sages (Pine Forest sages or Seven Sages) but conquers his own desire. He enters the forest to find them (or to avoid them), and they (or their impersonators) fall in love with him. The question of their actual seduction is unresolved, as in the myth of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga. Upon this part of the myth the story of the castration of Śiva and the origin of *liṅga* worship was grafted. The second half of the myth—the miraculous birth of Kumāra from the golden seed placed in fire and water—was used as a sequel to the sacred wedding of Śiva and Pārvatī; and this part of the Agni myth is based in turn upon a much older tale, the Vedic myth of Prajāpati's incestuous seed.

5. THE GOLDEN SEED OF FIRE

In the Vedas, Brahmā the Prajāpati is called Hiranyagarbha, "he of the womb of gold," to denote his creative powers.⁴² The cosmogonic myth then postulated a golden egg instead of a golden womb,⁴³ and this symbol was replaced in turn by the image of the god of the golden seed, an epithet of Agni and of Śiva.⁴⁴ By the time of the Epic, Śiva was also given the original Vedic epithet, "the golden womb,"⁴⁵ together with the golden seed.⁴⁶ The com-

⁴⁰ *MHB* III.213.41–52, III.214.1–17, III.219.1–15.

⁴¹ *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.27.36–37; *Haracarita* 10.78; *Śiva*, *Dharmasamhitā* 10.195.

⁴² *Rg Veda* X.121.1; *Atharva Veda* X.5.19; *Taittiriya Saṃhitā* 5.5.1.2; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 6.2.2.5.

⁴³ *Śatapatha* 11.1.6.1 and 6.1.1.10; *Manu* 1.8–9.

⁴⁴ *Amarakośa* (Bombay: Government Central Book Depot, 1896), 1.58.

⁴⁵ *MHB* I, Appendix 28, No. 1, l. 188, and *MHB* XII.291.12 and 17.

⁴⁶ *Liṅga* 1.20.80–86.

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mentary on this epithet of Śiva says, "First he created the waters, and released his seed in them, and that became the golden egg. In the form of Agni, he created the golden universal egg by shedding his seed."⁴⁷ As the passage implies, the golden egg was the earlier concept, and the golden seed was transferred from Agni to Śiva. But another text describes the situation in reverse, maintaining that when Agni bore Śiva's seed for 5,000 years (before the birth of Kumāra) his body became entirely golden, and so Agni became known as the bearer of the golden seed.⁴⁸ In fact, both Śiva and Agni derive this property from the Vedic Prajāpati.

F. ŚIVA AND BRAHMĀ : OPPOSITION AND IDENTITY

Śiva has attracted to himself many of the roles and characteristics of Brahmā, the creator, the giver of seed. In many of the later creation myths, Śiva comes forth to help Brahmā, usually in the form of an androgyne,⁴⁹ but originally, Brahmā himself was the androgyne.⁵⁰ In many of the early creation myths, Brahmā's sons, devoted to the performance of *tapas* for Śiva refuse to participate in creation. || In a later reversal, Brahmā himself plays the part of the ascetic son, to be replaced in turn by Śiva, as the creative son : "Śiva commanded Brahmā to create, but Brahmā did not; he meditated upon Śiva for the sake of knowledge, and Śiva was pleased by Brahmā's *tapas* and gave him the Vedas. But Brahmā still could not create, and so he again performed *tapas*, and Śiva offered him a boon, and Brahmā asked Śiva to be his son."⁵¹ And in a still later layer of the mythology, Brahmā again supplants the ascetic Rudra. # The balance shifts constantly between the two.

1. RUDRA VERSUS PRAJĀPATI

Although in several of the popular religious traditions of India Śiva is himself associated with the incest typical of a primeval creator,⁵² in traditional Sanskrit literature he is famed primarily

⁴⁷ *MHB* XIII.17.40 (Bombay); XIII.17.39 (Poona).

⁴⁸ *Vāmāna* 57.9-10.

⁴⁹ *Vāyu* 1.9.68-70; *Līṅga* 1.70.324-27; *Viṣṇu* 1.7.12-13.

⁵⁰ *Śatapatha* 14.4.2; *Manu* 1.32; *Viṣṇu* 1.7.14.

|| See Part I, Section B9.

⁵¹ *Skanda* 5.1.2.8-19.

See below, Section F4.

⁵² Verrier Elwin, *Tribal Myths of Orissa* (Oxford: Cumberlege, 1954), pp. 422-423; Verrier Elwin, *The Muria and their Ghotul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 257-58; Dahlquist, *op. cit.*, p. 75; Walter Ruben, *Eisenschmiede und Dämonen in Indien* (Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie, Vol. XXXVII, suppl. [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1939]), p. 213; Pradyot Kumar Maity, *Historical*

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as the chastiser of the incestuous Prajāpati. The Vedic incest myth does not mention Rudra, but commentators have identified him with the avenger in the original myth, and he is specifically active as such in the later versions. The incest myth supplies much of the imagery of the Kumāra birth story (in which Śiva himself takes over the role of Prajāpati) as well as the plot elements of the later addition to that story, the conflict between Śiva and Kāma (in which Śiva maintains his role as opponent of Prajāpati).** Thus the Purāṇic tradition rearranges elements of the Vedic myth in such a manner that Śiva plays the role of the original sexual protagonist as well as the ascetic antagonist.

The original myth is told in rather vague terms, like so much of the Ṛg Veda, and may in fact refer not to Brahmā and his daughter but merely to heaven and the dawn: "When the father, bent upon impregnating his own daughter, united with her and discharged his seed on the earth, the benevolent gods generated prayer; they fashioned Vāstoṣpati, the protector of sacred rites."⁵³ The father and the protector are not named, but the commentary elaborates: "Rudra Prajāpati created Rudra Vāstoṣpati with a portion of himself," identifying Rudra even here with both the protector and the creator. Four other verses in the Ṛg Veda seem to refer to this myth and to connect it with Agni: "[As] he [Agni] made the seed for the great father, heaven . . . the hunter shot him as he embraced his own daughter. Heaven laid the bright seed aside and Agni brought forth a youth. The father, heaven, impregnated his own daughter. The sacrificer into the fire committed incest with his own daughter."⁵⁴

The connection with Rudra is made explicit later in the Brāhmaṇas, which retained all the essentials of the Ṛg Vedic story—the incest, the seed shed upon the earth or into fire, and the punishment—and applied the myth to Prajāpati: "Prajāpati desired his daughter. He went to her, and his seed fell. He shed it in her. Then he heated it so that it would not spoil. He made it into all the animals."⁵⁵ This brief story is expanded in another Brāhmaṇa:

Prajāpati desired his daughter. . . . The gods said, "Prajāpati is doing something that is not to be done." They assembled various dreadful forms

Studies in the Cult of the Goddess Manasā (Calcutta, 1966), pp. 191–200; Edward C. Dimock, Jr., and A. K. Ramanujan, "Manasha: Goddess of Snakes," *History of Religions*, III (Winter, 1964), 304.

** See below, Section G2.

⁵³ Ṛg Veda X.61.7, with the commentary of Sāyaṇa.

⁵⁴ Ṛg Veda I.71.5 and 8; I.164.33; III.31.1.

⁵⁵ *Tāṇḍya Mahābrāhmaṇa* 8.2.10.

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and made a god to punish Prajāpati. He pierced him, and Prajāpati fled upwards. . . . The seed of Prajāpati poured out, and became a lake. The gods said, "Let not the seed of Prajāpati be ruined." They surrounded it with fire. The winds agitated it, and Agni made it move. The kindled seed became the sun; the blazing sparks became various sages, and the ashes various animals. Rudra claimed that what remained was his, but the gods deprived him of a claim.⁵⁶

The Kumāra story is a further expansion upon these themes. The seed of Prajāpati (Śiva) falls in a woman who cannot bear it (the daughter, or Pārvatī). It forms a lake (or is placed in the Ganges) and is surrounded by fire (swallowed by Agni), whereupon it becomes productive.

2. BRAHMĀ VERSUS KĀMA

In the creation myths composed at the time of the Epic, the "desire" which Brahmā felt for his daughter was personified as Kāma. Kāma then took the responsibility for the incestuous act (which even at the time of the Brāhmaṇas was hard for some to accept as the fault of Brahmā himself)⁵⁷ and was punished by Śiva as Brahmā Prajāpati was punished by Rudra. The punishment of Kāma by Śiva is generally implied but not narrated in the Brahmā-Kāma story, and it is in fact a separate motif, one which was known at the time of the Epic but only incorporated into Brahmā's story by the time of the Purāṇas.†† A typical version of this myth relates it to the theme of androgynous creation:

Brahmā, in order to create the worlds, meditated and prayed; he broke his body into two parts, half male and half female. When he saw the woman, who was Sāvitrī, Brahmā marvelled at her beauty and was excited by the arrows of Kāma, the male half of the androgyne. His sons reviled Brahmā, saying, "This is your daughter," but Brahmā continued to gaze at her face and even sprouted five heads in order to see her better. All the *tapas* that Brahmā had amassed for the sake of creation was destroyed by his desire for his daughter. Then Brahmā said to his sons, "Create gods and demons and men," and when they had gone to create, Brahmā made love to his daughter. After 100 years she gave birth to a son, Manu. . . .

Then Brahmā was ashamed of his excessive desire for his own daughter, and he cursed Kāma, saying, "Since your arrows excited my heart, Rudra will soon reduce your body to ashes." Then Kāma appeased Brahmā, arguing that he had merely acted as Brahmā had instructed him to do. Brahmā promised Kāma that he would become incarnate again, and Kāma departed, in sorrow because of the curse and in joy because of the remission.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *Āitareya Brāhmaṇa* 13.9–10; cf. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.7.4.1–7.

⁵⁷ *Brhaddevatā* 4.110–11; *Kausītaki Brāhmaṇa* 6.1–9; cf. Sylvain Lévi, *La doctrine du sacrifice dans les Brahmanas* ("Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, Sciences Religieuses," Vol. LXXIII; 2d ed. [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966]), p. 21.

†† See below, Section G.

⁵⁸ *Matsya* 3.30–44 and 4.11–21.

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Considerable rearrangement has been made in the filling of the original roles. The male half of the androgyne, who was originally Brahmā, then Rudra, is now Kāma.†† And in keeping with his new character, he incites but does not participate in the act of incest. Kāma here replaces Rudra in another sense as well; for just as Rudra pierces Prajāpati with an arrow to punish him for his incestuous act, so Kāma pierces Brahmā with an arrow to cause that act. Brahmā also fills several of the roles of Rudra; for he acts as chastiser (of Kāma) as well as chastised, bringing upon Kāma the curse of a punishment that Rudra (Śiva) will later fulfil. Rudra then does not revile Brahmā. This part of the role is played by Brahmā's sons, who act on behalf of the ascetic, antierotic Śiva as they often do. In many versions of the myth, Śiva himself appears at the scene of the crime to laugh at Brahmā and to mock him at great length.⁵⁹

3. BRAHMĀ VERSUS ŚIVA

The myth of the beheading of Brahmā by Śiva is very popular in India, primarily because it extols the virtue of the Kāpālika ("skull bearer") cult and of Benares ("Kapālamocana," "the freeing of the skull") as a shrine of expiation. The particular basis of the conflict underlying the beheading is the lust of Brahmā; this is not clear from later versions of the myth, but may be seen in certain early versions. The head that Śiva removes is the fifth head of Brahmā, which appeared in the first place because of Brahmā's incestuous lust. It is due to lust that it is destroyed:

Brahmā was dwelling in a lotus, trying to create. From his mouth a beautiful woman appeared; Brahmā was tortured by desire, grabbed her by force, and demanded that she relieve his agony by making love with him. In anger she said to him, "This fifth head is inauspicious on your neck. Four faces would be more suitable for you." Then she vanished, and the fire of Brahmā's anger burnt all the water on earth. Rudra then appeared and attacked the fifth head of Brahmā with his nails; he took up the severed head and became known as the Kapālin [skull bearer]; he wandered over all the sacred places on earth until he came to Kapālamocana in Benares, where the skull fell from his hand and he was purified. The gods praised him, and Śiva the Kapālin created from his own mouth a part of himself, born without a woman, a man who was an ascetic and who wandered over the earth, teaching the Aghora [Kāpālika] path.⁶⁰

The woman in this myth, created by Brahmā, must be his daugh-

†† See Part I, Section B9.

⁵⁹ Śiva 2.2.2.15-42, 2.2.3.1-78, 2.2.4.1-34; Kālikā 1.24-65, 2.1-59, 3.1-49; Mahābhāgavata 21.35-45; Skanda 5.2.13.1-20.

⁶⁰ Bhaviṣya 3.4.13.1-19.

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ter, though she is not explicitly mentioned as such. Rudra punishes Brahmā for his incest, not for his impiety or pride as in the later versions. The framework of the story is that of the creation myth in which Brahmā attempts to create, fails, and then is assisted by Rudra—who in this myth *helps* Brahmā by cutting off the head that interfered with the process of creation.

In another version, Brahmā's incest is a direct cause of the severing of the fifth head :

Brahmā desired Sarasvatī and went to her, asking her to stay with him. She, being his daughter, was furious at this and said, "Your mouth speaks inauspiciously and so you will always speak in a contrary way." From that day, Brahmā's fifth head spoke evilly and coarsely. Therefore one day when Śiva was wandering about with Pārvati and came to see Brahmā, Brahmā's four heads praised Śiva but his fifth head made an evil sound. Śiva, displeased with the fifth head, cut it off. The skull remained stuck fast to Śiva's hand, and though he was capable of burning it up, Śiva wandered the earth with it for the sake of all people, until he came to Benares.⁶¹

The secondary cause of the beheading—the insult to Śiva—is here combined with the primary cause—the daughter's curse, and the pious storyteller justifies Śiva's expiation by the argument from *bhakti*, §§ his willing submission "for the sake of all people." Here, as in the first version of the Kāpālika myth, Śiva's aggressive act is not only justified but considered a favor to Brahmā, ridding him of an inauspicious head. The act of beheading, however, is antagonistic, as is obvious from the context as well as the background myth of incest.

The Abbé Dubois records another version of the myth, which restores the sexual basis of the antagonism: "Brahma . . . was born with five heads, but he outraged Parvati, the wife of Siva, and Siva avenged himself by striking off one of the heads of the adulterous god in single combat."⁶² There does not seem to be any Sanskrit version of this myth, but the process of substituting Pārvati for the original woman is neatly paralleled by the popular tradition which makes Pārvati (instead of the sages' wives) the one with whom Agni commits adultery.⁶³ As Brahmā and Agni are often confused with Śiva in the mythology, such a transference is not surprising. In fact, the confusion of Śiva with Brahmā is the

⁶¹ *Śiva*, Jñānasamhitā 49.65–80.

§§ See Part I, Section A1.

⁶² Abbé J. A. Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, trans. and ed. H. K. Beauchamp (3d ed.; Oxford, 1959), p. 613.

⁶³ Arthur Miles (Mrs. Paul Danner, Gervée Baronti), *Land of the Lingam* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1933), pp. 219–20; Max-Pol Fouchet, *The Erotic Sculpture of India* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959), p. 8.

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explicit cause of the beheading in a South Indian version of the myth :

Long ago, Brahmā and Śiva both had five heads. One day Brahmā came to Pārvatī and she, mistaking him for Śiva because he had five heads, fed him. Śiva returned and criticized Pārvatī for feeding Brahmā before his return; Pārvatī asked Śiva to cut off one of Brahmā's heads so that she could distinguish between them. He did so, and, holding the head in his hand, he became mad and roamed through the burning places. Then Pārvatī took the head in her own hand and became mad ; she is revived by the sound of the temple drum.⁶⁴

Śiva is frequently called Pañcavaktra ("having five heads"), and is so portrayed in the iconography, but it is unusual to see such an explicit reference to the coincidence of attributes between two different gods. The real basis of the beheading is retained as an undercurrent of the myth, however. Pārvatī's inability to distinguish between the two gods would give rise to a sexual conflict between them (here masked by the reference to her "feeding" Brahmā) similar to the incestuous conflict which underlies the Sanskrit versions of the tale.

4. THE COMPETITION BETWEEN BRAHMĀ AND ŚIVA

The sexual basis of the competition between the two gods is revealed in a version of the creation myth which incorporates the great myth of their conflict—the myth of the flame *līṅga* :

Brahmā and Viṣṇu asked Rudra to create. He said, "I will do it," and then he plunged into the water for a thousand years. Brahmā and Viṣṇu began to worry, and Viṣṇu said, "There is not much time left. You must make an effort to create." Brahmā then made all the gods and demons and the other beings. When Śiva emerged from the water, about to begin creation, he saw that the universe was full. He thought, "What will I do? Creation has already been achieved by Brahmā. Therefore I will destroy it and tear out my own seed." So saying, he released a flame from his mouth, setting the universe on fire. Eventually Brahmā propitiated Śiva, who agreed to place in the sun the dangerous fire that he had emitted. Then Śiva broke off his *līṅga*, saying, "There is no use for this *līṅga* except to create creatures." He threw the *līṅga* upon the earth and it broke through the earth and went down to Hell and up to the heavens. Viṣṇu and Brahmā tried in vain to find the top and bottom of it, and they worshipped it.⁶⁵

In this myth, Śiva is castrated not in punishment for some sexual offense—as he is in the Pine Forest—but as evidence of the lack of that very sexuality. Death is necessitated by the fulness of the closed universe ; when Śiva discovers that he is not needed as a

⁶⁴ Told by the temple drummer (Pombaikaran) of Dharanpuram, Kongu; personal communication from Brenda E. F. Beck.

⁶⁵ *Śiva*, Dharmasamhitā 49.35–86; cf. *Śiva*, Dharmasamhitā 10.1–23, and *MHB* X.17.10–26.

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creator, he becomes a destroyer. Śiva's refusal to create is symbolized by his castration, but this too is ambivalent, for it results in the fertility cult of *līṅga* worship.

The basis of the feud between Śiva and Brahmā is not in this instance the conflict between the ascetic and the incestuous creator, but between the two different valid forms of creation: Śiva opposes the Prajāpati because he is himself a Prajāpati. This is clear from yet another myth of their conflict. When, at the wedding of Śiva and Satī, Brahmā is overcome with lust for the bride and even spills his seed⁶⁶ (as he does at the sight of his daughter in the incest myth, of which the wedding myth is a variant), Śiva wishes to kill Brahmā. Viṣṇu, trying to restrain him, argues: "Brahmā was born to perform creation; if he is killed, there can be no other natural creator." But Śiva replies, "I must kill this terrible sinner, but I myself will then create all beings, or by my own seed I will create another creator."⁶⁷ This competition between creators, one of them ascetic and the other sexual, is reflected in Ruben's interpretation of the Kapālin myth: "Śiva cut off the head of the Creator God, Brahmā, in order to become the creator himself."⁶⁸ This competition is clarified in another version of the creation myth:

Brahmā wished to create, but he did not know how to do it. He became angry, and Rudra was born from his anger. Brahmā gave Rudra a beautiful maiden for his wife, named Gaurī [Pārvatī], and Rudra rejoiced when he received her. Then Brahmā forbade Rudra to do *tapas* at the time of creation, saying, "Rudra, you must perform creation." But Rudra said, "I am unable," and he plunged into the water, for he thought, "One without *tapas* is not able to create creatures." Then Brahmā took Gaurī back; and, wishing to create, he made seven mind-born sons, Dakṣa and his brothers. He gave Gaurī to Dakṣa for a daughter, though she had been formerly promised in marriage to Rudra. Dakṣa rejoiced and began a great sacrifice which all the gods attended. Then, after 10,000 years, Rudra arose from the water, and by the power of his *tapas* he saw all the world before him with its forests and men and beasts, and he heard the chanting of the priests in Dakṣa's sacrifice. Then he became furious and he said, "Brahmā created me and instructed me to perform creation. Who is doing that work now?" and flames issued forth from his ears and turned into ghosts and goblins and various weapons. Rudra destroyed Dakṣa's sacrifice, but he restored it again when the gods praised him. Dakṣa gave his daughter to Rudra as Brahmā asked him to do, and Rudra took her with him to Kailāsa mountain.⁶⁹

Śiva's position here is unambiguous: he rejects the wife he has

⁶⁶ Śiva 2.2.19.1-76; 2.2.20.1-25; 2.3.49.3-10; Śiva, Jñānsaṃhitā 18.62-68; Skanda 1.1.26.15-22; 6.77.16-75; Saura 59.54-61; Vāmana 53.56-59; Brahma 72.18.

⁶⁷ Śiva 2.2.19.58-60.

⁶⁸ Ruben, *Eisenschmiede*, p. 207.

⁶⁹ Varāha 1.21.1-88.

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been given (though he is said to have rejoiced upon obtaining her) and does *tapas* because he is unable, rather than unwilling, to create without it. In the shorter version of this myth, Brahmā takes care to tell him, "Create creatures to fill the universe; you are able to do this,"⁷⁰ but Rudra disobeys him even then, and he clearly disagrees with him. The rejection of the woman who is the daughter of Dakṣa is the link used by the storyteller to introduce the related myth of the destruction of the sacrifice of Dakṣa, yet another variation on the theme of the conflict between Śiva and Brahmā; for Dakṣa is a Prajāpati who replaces Brahmā in later mythology and who comes to represent sexual creation and incest vis-à-vis ascetic creation.⁷¹ Yet Śiva does not reject the woman outright, nor does he reject creation—merely a particular aspect of it at a particular time.

5. THE COMPLEMENTARITY OF BRAHMĀ AND ŚIVA

Śiva's statement that he will become the destroyer, since there is already a creator, is typical of the series of myths in which Śiva, having been forbidden to create immortals, refuses to create mortals and henceforth refuses to create at all.⁷²|| A strong Śaiva bias usually prevails in these myths, and Śiva is not condemned for his passionlessness, as the ascetic sons of Brahmā usually are. But this reversal is only possible because the second path—sexual creation—is understood to be practiced by someone else, in this case Brahmā. The sons in the earlier myth are censured only when they are at that time the only possible source of creation. Thus, later Hinduism resolves the conflict with another division, not into cycles but into different persons, or rather different aspects of the one person who in the other context simply passes through different phases. Brahmā accomplishes sexual creation and Śiva devotes himself to asceticism; the universe is supplied with mortality and immortality. Moreover, by refusing to create mortals or creatures subject to sickness and old age, Śiva indulges in a kind of preventative euthanasia, a reversal of the reversal, so that the net result of his action is creative after all.

⁷⁰ *Varāha* 1.33.4.

⁷¹ *Śiva* 2.2.19.56, 2.2.42.22–29; *Līṅga* 1.63.2; *Bhāgavata* 4.2.22–23, 4.7.3; *Skanda* 4.2.87–89, 7.2.9.42; *Vāyu* 1.30.61; *Varāha* 1.33.1–33; *Devībhāgavata* 7.30.27–37; *Kūrma* 1.14.61; *Harivaṃśa* (Bombay: Lakṣmī-Venkaṭeśvara Steam Press, 1833–76), 3.22.1–7.

⁷² *MHB* VII, Appendix 1, No. 8, ll. 70–131; *Matsya* 4.30–32; *Vāyu* 1.10.42–59; *Brahmānda* 2.9.68–92; *Śiva* 7.14; *Līṅga* 1.6.10–22; *Skanda* 7.2.9.5–17; *Kūrma* 1.10.17–40.

|| See Part I, Section B9.

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The complementarity of the two creative methods is clear from this variation :

Brahmā created the mind-born sages, who remained celibate and refused to create. Brahmā then created Rudra from his anger, and he gave him various wives and told him to become a Prajāpati and to create progeny with the wives he had received. Rudra created creatures like himself who swallowed up the universe on all sides, burning up the skies with their blazing eyes. Prajāpati was frightened and said, "No more of these creatures ; do *tapas* for the sake of all creatures, and create the universe as it was before." Śiva agreed, and he went to the forest to do *tapas*. Then Brahmā created his mental sons and Kāma.⁷³

Here Śiva's act of creation is directly connected with death. Only creation by *tapas* is acceptable from Rudra, and Brahmā supplements this method with his sexual creation and with the creation of Kāma, to preserve the balance.

Thus Brahmā and Śiva participate in aspects of each other so deeply that they exchange roles almost at random. Śiva often acts for or instead of Brahmā, and his opposition to Brahmā is often based upon similarity of purpose. In many of the later myths, sexual creation is personified as Kāma. And just as Brahmā opposes Kāma and curses him, so Śiva brings about the realization of that curse, partly as the ascetic in opposition to Brahmā (resisting the attacks of Kāma that Brahmā has directed) and partly as an extension of Brahmā (chastising Kāma as Brahmā cursed him to be chastised). Moreover, just as Brahmā both curses Kāma and restores him, so Śiva too destroys Kāma, but simultaneously participates in Kāma's nature and increases his power. In this way, the complex identity-opposition relation between Brahmā and the various aspects of Śiva underlies much of what appears to be paradoxical in the later mythology of Śiva.

G. ŚIVA AND KĀMA

The conflict between Śiva and Kāma is a central point of the Śaiva Purāṇas. In the later texts, Kāma is sent against Śiva by Brahmā, merely out of spite and in revenge against Śiva for chastising Brahmā's incestuous behavior, as well as against Kāma for causing this behavior.⁷⁴ In the earlier Purāṇas, however, Kāma is sent by Indra to cause Śiva to marry and beget the son needed by the gods. And in a still earlier era, before Śiva became the ascetic par

⁷³ *Bhāgavata* 3.12.1-26.

⁷⁴ *Brhadharma* 2.53.40-41; *Mahābhāgavata* 12-28; *Śiva* 2.2.8.12-22; *Skanda* 5.2.13.

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excellence, Indra sent Kāma (or his assistants, the *apsaras*-es) to seduce ascetics in order to reduce the threat of their powers. In the context of the Kumāra story, where the Kāma-Śiva conflict takes place, this episode is late.⁷⁵ The birth of Kumāra resulted first from the incestuous seed of Prajāpati, then from Agni's seduction of the sages' wives, and then from the gods' need for a general. Yet most of the Purāṇas include the episode of Kāma, and it is highly significant for Śaiva mythology. Moreover, though the episode itself is comparatively late, the interaction of the forces which Śiva and Kāma represent—namely *tapas* and *kāma*—is central to Indian culture from the time of the Vedas and even before. Due to the remarkable continuity of that culture, the more elaborate and explicit myths of the Purāṇas may in fact capture and explain, as they claim to do, the often obscure meaning of the ancient tales.

1. THE CHASTITY OF ŚIVA—AND ITS CONTRADICTION

Śiva is the natural enemy of Kāma because he is the epitome of chastity, the eternal *brahmacārīn*, his seed drawn up,⁷⁶ the very incarnation of chastity.⁷⁷ When Himālaya brings his daughter Pārvati to Śiva, Śiva objects with the traditional argument of misogyny: "This girl with her magnificent buttocks must *not* come near me; I insist upon this. Wise men know that a woman is the very form of Enchantment, especially a young woman, the destruction of ascetics. I am an ascetic, a yogi; what use have I for a woman? An ascetic must never have contact with women."⁷⁸ Because of his chastity, Śiva is considered the one man in the universe who can resist Kāma. When Brahmā plots to have Śiva seduced, he says, "But what woman in the triple world could enter his heart, cause him to abandon yoga, and delude him? Even Kāma will not be able to delude him, for Śiva is a perfect yogi and cannot bear even to hear women mentioned."⁷⁹ But each of these statements is merely a thesis to be answered with an antithesis: Śiva's chastity is set against his lust, his invulnerability against his susceptibility. Many of the myths illustrating the chastity of

⁷⁵ A comparatively early reference to the burning of Kāma by Śiva appears in an inscription of A.D. 473–74, cited in John Faithfull Fleet, *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors* ("Corpus inscriptionum indicarum," Vol. III [Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1888]), No. 18, p. 81, pl. xi, ll. 21–23.

⁷⁶ *MHB* XIII.17.45 and 72.

⁷⁷ *Kumārasambhava* 5.30.

⁷⁸ *Śiva* 2.3.12.28–33.

⁷⁹ *Śiva* 2.2.8.17–18; cf. *Matsya* 154.213–16 and *Skanda* 1.2.24.17–20.

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Śiva appear in a mirror image as well, or contain within themselves implications of his lust.

One Śaiva tale apparently in praise of Śiva's chastity is an elaboration upon the myth in which Śiva enlightens Viṣṇu and causes him to leave the form of the boar in which he has married the Earth.## In this version, the Earth is replaced by a group of demon women, but the troublesome sons remain :

Once when Viṣṇu had driven the demons back to Hell, he happened to see there a group of beautiful women ; struck by the arrows of desire, he stayed there and made love to the women, engendering in them sons that troubled the world. To save the gods, Śiva took the form of a bull ; he entered Hell, bellowing, and killed Viṣṇu's sons. Then he enlightened Viṣṇu, saying, "You must not indulge yourself sexually here, a slave to desire, dependent upon women." The other gods wished to enter Hell to see the voluptuous women, but Śiva pronounced a curse, saying, "Except for a perfectly controlled sage or a demon born of me, whoever enters this place will die." Thus Viṣṇu the supreme womanizer was chastised by Śiva, and the universe became happy.⁸⁰

Śiva's position in this myth is fairly unequivocal in its chastity, but even here he assumes the form of a bull, the emblem of sexuality, instead of the mythical *śarabha* beast of the boar myth, and he cleverly modifies the curse to allow himself ("the perfectly controlled sage") and his sons to enjoy the demon women. The second variant elaborates upon this aspect of Śiva until the whole point of the myth is reversed. After repeating the above myth with some minor variations, it continues :

After Śiva had pronounced the curse and the gods had returned to heaven, some time passed. Then one day, when Śiva was rapt in thought and Pārvatī asked him what he was thinking about, Śiva said, "I am thinking about the beauty of the women of Hell, the most beautiful women in the universe." Pārvatī wanted to see them for herself ; she went to Hell and said to the women there, "You are like poisonous vines, for your beauty is of no use. Prajāpati created women for the sake of the sexual enjoyment of men, but Śiva cursed your husbands, forbidding them to enter here. Now let my sons, Śiva's hosts, wise ascetics, be your husbands. [The commentator adds : 'They are ascetics, and so Śiva has not forbidden their entrance here']. Make love with them." Then she vanished. Thus Viṣṇu the supreme womanizer sported with the demon women in Hell.⁸¹

The reversal of the myth is clear from the reversal of the final line, where Viṣṇu's sport, rather than his chastisement, is remembered. Śiva himself cannot help thinking about the women, and the ambivalence of his position is revealed in the variant provided by his sons—who are allowed to make love to the demon women be-

See Part I, Section B1.

⁸⁰ Śiva 3.22.45–55; 3.23.1–36.

⁸¹ Śiva, Dharmasamhitā 9.46–61.

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cause of their status as ascetics and their supposed chastity. But this paradox is a description of the contradictory nature of Śiva himself.

Indeed, it is almost impossible to find a myth in which Śiva remains chaste throughout, though many myths are based upon the initial premise of his chastity. Even in the *Mahābhārata* passage which describes him as the chaste *brahmacārin*, Śiva is praised as the god who "sports with the daughters and the wives of the sages, with erect hair, a great penis, naked, with an excited look. . . . All the gods worship his *liṅga*."⁸²

2. THE BURNING OF KĀMA—AND THE REVIVAL

The destruction of the god of desire would seem to be an unequivocally antisexual act, and that is in fact its original significance. The *Mahābhārata* says: "The great *brahmacārin*, Śiva, did not devote himself to the pleasures of lust; the husband of Pārvatī extinguished Kāma when Kāma attacked him, making Kāma bodiless."⁸³ Yet even here, the chastiser of Kāma is simultaneously called the husband of Pārvatī, the erotic aspect of Śiva. Throughout the Purāṇas, the meaning of the conquest of Kāma by Śiva is undercut by qualifying episodes and even complete reversals: Śiva burns Kāma only to revive him in a more powerful form; Śiva burns Kāma but is nevertheless sexually aroused; Śiva burns Kāma and is therefore a desirable lover; Śiva is himself burnt by Kāma; and, the final Hindu complication, Śiva *is* Kāma.

Rebirth from fire is a generally accepted theme in Hinduism,⁸⁴ and ashes are a particularly potent form of seed.⁸⁵ The ashes of Kāma, when smeared upon Śiva's body in place of the usual funeral ashes, arouse great desire in him.⁸⁶ Thus Kāma's rebirth from his ashes is not surprising; in the Hindu tradition, the burning itself implies the revival. Even in the simple context of the myth, Kāma's power is not destroyed when Śiva burns him. Kāma remains "Anaṅga," bodiless, but is said to retain his sexual function.⁸⁷ Later, he is actually revived and given a new body, a new incarnation.

⁸² *MHB* XIII, Appendix 1, No. 4, ll. 66–67, and XIII.14.101–2.

⁸³ *MHB* XII.183.10.3–5.

⁸⁴ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 2.2.4.8.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.8.2.1–2 and 6; *Padma* 4.103.1–26; *Brahmaṇḍa* 2.27.112–13; *Liṅga* 1.34.1–3 and 7–8; *Śiva*, *Jñānasamhitā* 48.86–89; Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

⁸⁶ *Brhaddharma* 2.53.45–46; *Kālikā* 44.125–26, 45.117–18; *Mahābhāgavata* 24.1–8. Cf. *Brahmavaivarta* 4.43.27, 4.38.12, 4.45.20; *Śiva* 2.3.19.27, 2.5.23.51; *Matsya* 154.259; *Kumārasambhava* 4.34, 4.27.

⁸⁷ *Brhaddharma* 2.53.44.

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Often, Śiva revives Kāma at the request of Pārvatī.⁸⁸ Even at the time of the original curse, it is said that Kāma will be reborn when Śiva marries, or when he becomes impassioned,⁸⁹ that is, when Kāma reasserts his power over Śiva.⁹⁰ Pārvatī participates still more directly in the revival of Kāma. She herself is the essence of Kāma even when Kāma is destroyed; when Kāma was burnt and became bodiless, his essence entered into her limbs.⁹¹ Usually, this reincarnation is merely a metaphor: "May the water of Śiva's sweat, fresh from the embrace of Gaurī, which Kāma employs as his aqueous weapon because of his fear of the fire of Śiva's eye, protect you."⁹² Pārvatī is of course a particularly apt form for Kāma to assume, as it was for her sake that he was burnt and it was her lover who burnt him, but the poetic image is extended to other women as well,⁹³ particularly to the wives of the Pine Forest sages: "One woman, strewing flowers before him, seemed to be the flower-bow of Kāma, which had assumed her form when it was frightened by the eye in Śiva's forehead. . . . Another woman teased Śiva, saying, 'Did you open the fiery eye in your forehead and burn Kāma?' to which he replied, 'I am indeed made a laughingstock when he is reborn in your gaze, lovely one.'"⁹⁴

The revival of Kāma for the sake of Śiva's honeymoon already indicates that Śiva has undergone a change of heart, so it is not surprising that the reborn Kāma has powers over Śiva that he did not have before Śiva destroyed him.⁹⁵ Śiva reincarnates Kāma with a half of Śiva's embodied essence in him,⁹⁶ or he makes Kāma one of his own hosts.⁹⁷ In one version of the myth, Śiva revives Kāma at the wedding and gives him permission to use his arrows even against Śiva himself.⁹⁸ When the goddess revives Kāma, she promises him: "Śiva will lose his control because of you, and though his hatred of passion will make him angry at you, he will not be able to burn you, and he will marry Pārvatī." When Kāma

⁸⁸ *Saura* 54.1-4 and 16-20, 55.1-6.

⁸⁹ *Skanda* 5.1.34.36-37; *Śiva* 2.3.24.18-28; *Kālikā* 3.15, 4.16-17; *Brahmavaivarta* 4.39.57.

⁹⁰ *Haracarita* 9.154.

⁹¹ *Bṛhaddharma* 2.53.44.

⁹² *Kathāsaritsāgara* 2.1.1; cf. 1.1.1., 3.1.2.; and cf. *Kumārasambhava* 1.41.

⁹³ *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa* No. 395.

⁹⁴ *Bhikṣātānakāvya* 8.20, 9.6.

⁹⁵ *Pārvatīpariṇaya* of Bāṇabhaṭṭa (Madras Sanskrit Series No. 1 [Madras, 1898]), 4.34 and 5.32.3.

⁹⁶ *Bhaviṣya* 3.4.14.80.

⁹⁷ *Śiva* 2.3.19.37-48.

⁹⁸ *Kumārasambhava* 7.92-93; *Kathāsaritsāgara* 3.6.60-73.

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then attacks Śiva, Śiva is so heated with desire that he cannot cure the fever of his body, even by lying in snowy waters. Unable to extinguish the flame of Kāma, he decides to marry Pārvatī.⁹⁹

3. THE EROTIC APPEAL OF THE CHASTISER OF KĀMA

Many texts imply that Śiva was wounded by Kāma at the time when he supposedly destroyed Kāma.¹⁰⁰ Śiva himself often admits that he is in the power of Kāma,¹⁰¹ and his supposed conquest of Kāma is often cited satirically when Śiva is erotically engaged:¹⁰²

“So now this Śaṅkara [Śiva], whose asceticism is known through all the world,

fearful of absence from his mistress, bears her in his very form.

And they say that we were overcome by him!”

Victory to Love, who with these words

presses Priti's [Rati's] hand and falls to laughter.¹⁰³

The basis of the satire is the same as that of the false ascetic; because of his reputation for chastity, Śiva's seduction is all the more to the credit of Kāma and to the seductress. In praising Pārvatī's beauty, Nārada says, “She caused Śiva, who is without passion and is the enemy of Kāma, to wander like a minnow lost in the depths of her loveliness.”¹⁰⁴ This “lack of passion” makes Śiva all the more desirable, as it does the conventional ascetic.*** The women of Himālaya's city marvel at Śiva's beauty and say, “Kāma's body was not burnt by Śiva when his anger mounted, but I think that out of shame when he saw Śiva, Kāma himself burnt his body.”¹⁰⁵

It is his supposed invulnerability to desire that causes Pārvatī to desire Śiva; she wants him for her husband because he has destroyed Kāma. Although everyone cites the burning of Kāma when trying to dissuade her from her love of Śiva,¹⁰⁶ Pārvatī merely laughs and replies, “This passionless Śiva, who burnt Kāma, will be won by my *tapas*, for he is loving to his devotees.”¹⁰⁷ But the *bhakti* argument is superfluous here, for the contradiction

⁹⁹ *Brahmāṇḍa* 4.30.58–61 and 71–84; cf. *Skanda* 7.1.200.9–30.

¹⁰⁰ *Śiva* 2.2.17.63–64; *Kālikā* 10.54–55.

¹⁰¹ *Mahābhāgavata* 24.28, 25.25; *Vāmana* 6.36; *Pārvatīpariṇaya* 4.7.

¹⁰² *Śiva* 2.5.51.35–46.

¹⁰³ *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa* No. 323.

¹⁰⁴ *Skanda* 2.4.17.10; cf. *Padma* 6.11.6.

*** See Part I, Section B4.

¹⁰⁵ *Matsya* 154.473; *Kumārasambhava* 7.67; cf. *Vāmana* 53.30–31.

¹⁰⁶ *Śiva* 2.3.25.45, 2.3.23.5; *Skanda* 1.1.21.150, 1.2.25.67; *Matsya* 154.327–28.

¹⁰⁷ *Śiva* 2.3.23.12; *Skanda* 1.1.21.155.

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is inherently resolvable in psychological terms. Kālidāsa expresses this resolution in metaphor:

Though Kāma's body was destroyed by Śiva's eye,
his arrow, unable to reach its goal
and repelled by Śiva's unbearable cry of defiance,
wounded Pārvatī deeply in her heart.¹⁰⁸

Thus Pārvatī desires Śiva because he has destroyed Desire. And when she has won him, the poet describes her as "naively smiling when they say that he hates Love."¹⁰⁹ In the midst of another erotic adventure, Śiva remarks, "Kāma is attacking me, remembering our former enmity."¹¹⁰ Thus Śiva admits that his "destruction" of Kāma has merely added to Kāma's power over him.

4. THE LUST OF THE CHASTISER OF KĀMA

Even without the episodes of the revival of Kāma or the eventually successful attack waged by him, the very act of burning Kāma betrays Śiva's vulnerability and innately erotic nature. Śiva is highly aroused by Kāma before he can regain control of himself.¹¹¹ Śiva himself muses upon this phenomenon: "How can I lust to make love to Pārvatī when she has not performed a vow of *tapas*? And how is it that I wish to rape her? How can I have been excited by desire when I do not wish it right now? For some reason I seem to be attracted to this girl and to wish to unite with her."¹¹²

When Kāma uses various magical wiles to arouse Śiva, entering his heart in the form of the humming of bees or shooting him with flower arrows, Śiva regains his composure with great effort by various techniques of yoga.¹¹³ The subduing of lust is an important part of yoga philosophy, which emphasizes that the lust must be present in the first place for the yogi to work upon: ††† "Once the mind has stimulated the power of sex, the yogi cannot recover his mastery over himself, the brilliance of his inner light, until he has burned up lust by bringing the power of his seed up to the fifth center."¹¹⁴ Just as Kāma's body is preserved in its essence in the ashes on the chest of the ascetic, so the power of lust within the

¹⁰⁸ *Kumārasambhava* 5.54.

¹⁰⁹ *Subhāṣitaratnaśa* No. 65.

¹¹⁰ *Kālikā* 52.112.

¹¹¹ *Śiva*, *Jñānasamhitā* 9–18, 10.73; *Śiva* 2.3.18; *Skanda* 1.1.21, 5.2.13; *Vāmana* 6; *Matsya* 154.237–38.

¹¹² *Kālikā* 44.110–12.

¹¹³ *Matsya* 154.235–48; *Haracarita* 9.53–57; *Skanda* 5.2.13.27–35.

††† See Part I, Section D3.

¹¹⁴ R. K. Narayan, *Gods, Demons, and Others* (New York: Viking Press, 1964), p. 94.

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ascetic is not fully destroyed but is transmuted into ascetic power.

The original presence of the emotion of lust is implied in Śiva's violent reaction to Kāma; were he totally impervious, he would not even have bothered to burn Kāma.¹¹⁵ A Ceylonese version of the burning of Kāma makes explicit this vulnerability of Śiva:

Maha Ishvara [Śiva] is God. Uma his wife lives in his turban because from the turban it is very easy to have sexual intercourse. One day Uma saw a man of great beauty. She had sex relations with the man. When Maha Ishvara heard of this he was angry and gazed on the man with his third eye. The man was reduced to ashes. Uma craved Maha Ishvara's pardon and begged him to recreate the man. The man was recreated but he was without genitals.¹¹⁶

Here, Śiva injures Kāma not because Kāma has tried to inspire lust in him, but because he has tried to interfere with it. The reversal of the usual roles is revealed by the nature of the punishment inflicted upon Kāma: castration, which is the central motif of many of the myths of Śiva. The significance of this punishment in this context, and its pertinence to both Śiva and Kāma, arises from the theme of the destruction (or castration) and resurrection of the fertility god, Śiva or Kāma. Meyer suggests that the myth of Śiva's burning of Kāma stems from the Indo-Germanic rite of burning the tree that symbolizes the daemon of fertility (the ancient "Indra pole"), and that this burning was later replaced by the self-castration of the god.¹¹⁷ Thus, just as Śiva's castration is procreative, releasing into the universe at large the power of his *liṅga*, so his burning of Kāma is ultimately conducive to fertility.

5. THE PARTIAL IDENTITY OF ŚIVA AND KĀMA

In a relationship similar to that which characterizes his conflict with Brahmā, Śiva opposes Kāma in part due to their opposition as ascetic and erotic gods, but in part also because of their competition as fertility gods. The argument used to make Brahmā retract his curse upon Kāma is used to make Śiva revive him: "Have mercy toward Kāma. It was you who created him and who instructed him in the very action which he has performed, using the ability that you gave him."¹¹⁸ The South Indian tradition

¹¹⁵ *Subhāṣitaratnakōṣa* No. 4.

¹¹⁶ Nur O. Yalman, personal communication based on field work undertaken in Ceylon (central) in 1954-55; cited by Edmund R. Leach, "Pulleyar and the Lord Buddha: An Example of Syncretism," *Psychoanalysis and the Psychoanalytic Review* (Summer, 1962), pp. 89-90.

¹¹⁷ Johann Jakob Meyer, *Trilogie der Altindischer Mächte und Feste der Vegetation* (Zürich: Max Niehans Verlag, 1937), I, 206.

¹¹⁸ *Kālikā* 44.121-22; *Skanda* 1.1.21.96.

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states that Śiva created Kāma and gave him the boon of exciting love among all creatures when Kāma had adored the Śiva-*liṅga*.¹¹⁹ Śiva, in his turn, partakes of the nature of Kāma: he becomes Kāma to seduce the Pine Forest women;¹²⁰ he resembles Kāma when seducing many *apsaras*-es and mortal women;¹²¹ he is a master of the *Kāmasūtra*;¹²² and he is “the Lord of Kāma [Kāmeśvara]” when he marries.¹²³

One passage links Śiva with Kāma in the seduction of a number of sages, including several who are aspects of Śiva or the enemies of Śiva: “Śiva, assisted by Kāma, deluded many heroes by his powers of magic, causing Viṣṇu to rape the wives of other men, Indra to sin with Gautama’s wife and to be cursed, Agni to be conquered by Kāma, Dakṣa and his brothers to lust for their sister, Brahmā to wish to make love to his daughter—and all of them were deluded by Śiva.”¹²⁴ These myths, which involve Śiva either as seduced or as seducer, are lumped together to glorify the erotic aspect of Śiva.

The complexity of the manner in which Kāma, Śiva, Brahmā, and Agni—all representing different aspects of creation—assume one another’s roles may be seen in a version of the burning of Kāma which transposes almost every episode of the myth, beginning with what is usually the end: the gods beg Śiva to marry and beget a son; Śiva refuses to have anything to do with a woman, but he gives them his seed [*tejas*, fiery glory], placed in Agni, and returns to his meditation. Only at this point does Kāma appear:

The gods went with Śiva’s seed and told Brahmā what had happened; Brahmā laughed, and from his mouth Kāma appeared, born from Brahmā’s creative heat [*tejas*]. Kāma’s power [*tejas*] caused men and women everywhere to unite, tortured by lust, but Śiva created a great ascetic fire [*tejas*] from his third eye and assuaged that sickness. Kāma became angry at this, and, taking up his arrows, he filled Śiva with desire. Śiva married Pārvatī, the *yoginī*, and made love to her for a thousand years. The gods, afraid that the world would be destroyed, went there and praised Śiva. Śiva and Pārvatī were ashamed and angry, and a great heat arose from them. The gods fled, but Kāma alone remained there, unafraid; the fire of Śiva’s anger burnt Kāma to ashes, but Rati propitiated Śiva so that he promised to revive Kāma with a half of his own essence.¹²⁵

Almost every element of the basic myth has been transposed: the

¹¹⁹ R. Dessigane, J. Filliozat, and P. Z. Pattabiramin, *Les légendes śivaïtes de Kāñcīpuram* (Pondichéry, 1964), No. 48, pp. 61–62.

¹²⁰ *Skanda* 5.3.38.17.

¹²¹ *Padma* 5.53.6.

¹²² *Śiva* 2.3.50.38.

¹²³ *Brahmaṇḍa* 4.14.18–21.

¹²⁴ *Śiva* 5.4.16–39.

¹²⁵ *Bhaviṣya* 3.4.14.45.

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giving of the seed comes first instead of last; Kāma is created when Brahmā laughs at the way in which Śiva has shed his seed instead of when Śiva laughs at the shedding of Brahmā's seed;††† Kāma attacks Śiva because Śiva has burnt the essence of Kāma instead of the usual situation in which Śiva burns Kāma because Kāma has attacked him; and after the wedding, when Śiva usually restores Kāma, he finally burns him up—not for stimulating desire but for interrupting it, as Agni usually does. In fact, the burning of Kāma replaces the “burning” of Agni (i.e., the cursing of Agni to bear the burning seed), which has already taken place at the beginning of the whole sequence. This exchange of roles evolves from the basic similarity and flexibility of the characters involved, all of whom epitomize some aspect of *tejas*, the fiery power to create or destroy: *tejas* is Agni; it is the burning seed of Śiva, the creative laugh of Brahmā, the power of Kāma to inspire desire, the power generated by the love making of Śiva and Pārvatī, and the fire of Śiva's third eye. All of these are essential to the myth, no matter at what place in the myth they may occur.

As Śiva and Kāma are both creators, their roles are closely intertwined in the creation myths, as are the roles of Śiva and Brahmā. In one version of the androgynous creation, Kāma is the male half instead of Śiva,¹²⁶§§§ and Brahmā creates Kāma in order to proceed with eternal creation, just as he enlists the aid of Rudra when his ascetic sons fail him. Creation usually proceeds from a combination of the erotic and ascetic powers; so the ultimate power of Kāma is derived from the force of his original essence strengthened by the contact with Śiva:

Śiva reduced Kāma to ashes, and the fire from his third eye then yawned wide to burn the universe. But then, for the sake of the world, Śiva dispersed that fire among mangoes and the moon and flowers and bees and cuckoos—thus he divided the fire of Kāma. That fire which had pierced Śiva inside and outside, kindling passion and affection, serves to arouse people who are separated, reaching the hearts of lovers, and it blazes night and day, hard to cure.¹²⁷

Kāma's power is thus no longer concentrated in one anthropomorphic form but is diffused into the world, like the demons from Pandora's box. It is only by “destroying” Kāma that Śiva releases the full power of Kāma, the more compelling as it is augmented by contact with Śiva's own force. The interaction of the

††† See Part I, Section B2.

¹²⁶ *Brahmavaivarta* 4.35.39.

§§§ See Part I, Section B9, and above, Section F2.

¹²⁷ *Matsya* 154.250–55.

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two supposedly incompatible fires—the fire of desire and the fire of asceticism—is clear from the context. The phrase “the fire of Kāma” is a pun, denoting the fire used *by* Kāma and *against* him as well. The image of the intermingling fires (transmuted into the mango and cuckoo) appears in a classical verse :

Within the wood the cuckoos charm the heart
with warbling of their throats grown strong
from eating of fresh mango buds.
What here pretend to be their eyes,
if but the truth were known, are sparks
fanned by the flames of Śiva's glance
from the coals of burning Love.¹²⁸

Yet, in spite of all the examples of the interchanging roles of the two gods and the intermingling of their powers, it is clear that whereas Kāma is merely one aspect of Śiva, the reverse is not true. Śiva is Kāma—but he is more as well, and it is this “more” that opposes Kāma. Śiva is the god of virility, Kāma the god of sensuality.¹²⁹ Śiva burns Kāma because of Kāma's frivolous approach to a matter which for Śiva involves the procreation of the cosmos rather than the titillation which is Kāma's stock in trade. When Pārvatī accuses Śiva of taking no pleasure in Desire, Śiva replies : “Our love is more than Desire ; how could it be born of mere Desire ? Formerly, I made the universe by giving birth to Desire, and I myself made Desire for the sexual pleasure of each person. How then can you reproach me for burning Desire ? Kāma thought that I was just like the other gods, and he disturbed my mind, and so I burnt him to ashes.”¹³⁰

From this it appears that Śiva objects not to Kāma's essence, which he accepts as his own, but to Kāma's particular way of manifesting it. Similarly, Brahmā, who created Kāma to excite creatures, cursed him not for doing so but for doing it at an inappropriate time and place. Both Śiva and Kāma are fertility gods, but Śiva is ascetic and destructive as well ; and Śiva has not merely assimilated the character of Kāma, for Kāma is a comparative latecomer to the Indian scene, and Śiva's creative aspect is taken from Indra and Agni and Brahmā long before the advent of Kāma. It is in Agni in particular that Śiva and Kāma merge, both being aspects of the erotic fire, while Śiva also represents the ascetic fire.

¹²⁸ *Subhāṣitaratnakōṣa* No. 171.

¹²⁹ P. Thomas, *Kāma Kalpa: The Hindu Ritual of Love* (11th ed.; Bombay: D. B. Taraporevala, 1959), p. 114.

¹³⁰ *Śiva* 7.1.24.43–45.

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H. ASCETICS, HOUSEHOLDERS, AND FOREST-DWELLERS IN ŚAIVA MYTHOLOGY

In some versions of the Pine Forest myth, Śiva acts as an ascetic against the wives of the sages to make the sages devote themselves to more perfect *tapas*. In others he acts as an erotic god to shock the sages out of their *tapas* and back to their marital responsibilities. This confusion of purposes is strengthened by the ambiguity of Śiva himself in this respect. Śiva resolves these conflicts to a great extent within his own character, and the failure of the myth to come to a similar resolution with regard to his human counterparts, the forest-dwellers, is due to the innate character of the myth, which, although free to pursue certain solutions impossible in the world of reality, must ultimately falter in the attempt to resolve a true social contradiction. |||| Śiva himself opposes the compromise attempted by the forest-dwellers, striving in different versions to correct flaws either of asceticism or of worldliness, so that one goal does not eclipse the other.

1. ŚIVA VERSUS THE FOREST-DWELLERS

Śiva's opposition to the wives of the sages is based in part upon his character as the chaste, misogynist ascetic, but also upon the more generally held view that women can only cause trouble when they accompany their husbands to the forest, #### a theory which Śiva proves by seducing them. Śiva says, "Their wives are princesses proud of their beauty, and they befoul the sages' minds so that the sages curse whatever men enter the woods, in fear of the infidelity of their own wives. . . . Those 'ascetics' lust for their wives' lotus mouths."¹³¹ The sages themselves attribute their shortcomings to their marital status: "We have the wits of fools; the Self has not been revealed to the householder."¹³²

Just as much evidence can be adduced for the opposite point of view—that Śiva comes to the forest to teach the sages to give up their *tapas* and to devote themselves to their wives. Brahmā says to the sages, "You live in a hermitage but you are overcome by anger and lust; yet the true hermitage of a wise man is his home, while for the man who is not a true yogi even the hermitage is merely a house."¹³³ Agrawala sees in this myth the doctrine by

||| See Part I, Section A1.

See Part I, Section C2.

¹³¹ *Haracarita* 10.27-188; *Yāgīśvaramāhātmya* 27b.10.

¹³² *Skanda* 6.258.25-26.

¹³³ *Vāmana* 43.87.

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which "one performs the ordained duties of the householder's life and thus obtains the objective of true renunciation,"¹³⁴ that is, the traditional attempt to reconcile the two goals.**** This is Śiva's familiar antiascetic role, the Dionysian aspect that he assumes in order to oppose the *tapas* of the sons of Brahmā (who are the Pine Forest sages)¹³⁵ and to send them back to the world of normal social involvement.

In this way, both points of view are often expressed side by side in a single version, and almost all versions agree on a somewhat modified form of each extreme: Śiva praises *śanti*, calm self-control and lack of passion, even in versions which condemn violent *tapas*,¹³⁶ and he teaches the value of *liṅga* worship even while criticizing excessive attachment to one's wife.¹³⁷ He points out the insufficiency of mere *tapas* alone: "The sages are not free from emotions, though they have entered the forest and performed the rituals. . . . The smearing of ashes upon the body, the wearing of great matted locks, the bald head, garland of skulls, nakedness, the ochre robe—the whole vow is made vain by desire and anger. Being in such a state, they will not obtain Release by means of *tapas*, which merely dries up the body."¹³⁸ Desire must be conquered, not denied; it is by means of *liṅga* worship that *tapas* becomes successful; once the sages with their wives have worshiped his *liṅga*, they succeed;¹³⁹ yet they must honor the *liṅga* while maintaining true chastity and great *tapas*.¹⁴⁰ *Tapas*—with true chastity—and devotion to their wives—with *liṅga* worship—each must be done in the proper way, and then they sustain rather than oppose each other.

2. ŚIVA'S FAILURE TO RECONCILE THE ROLES OF ASCETIC AND HOUSEHOLDER

The conflict within Śiva's own character is more inescapable and yet ultimately more possible to resolve. The initial attempt at

¹³⁴ Vasudeva Sarana Agrawala, *Vāmana Purāṇa: A Study* (Benares: All-India Kashiraj Trust, 1964), p. 87.

**** See Part I, Section C1.

¹³⁵ *Kūrma* 2.39.39–40; *Haracarita* 10.7–8; *Skanda* 7.3.39.8; *Vāmana* 43.40–95, 44.1–39.

¹³⁶ *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.27; *Vāmana* 43–44; *Kūrma* 2.39.43–67; *Liṅga* 1.29 and 31; *Darpadalana* 7.

¹³⁷ *Vāmana* 6 and 43; *Yāgīśvaramāhātmya*; *Śiva*, *Dharmasamhitā* 10; *Jñānasamhitā* 42; *Liṅga* 1.29 and 31; *Skanda* 5.2.11, 6.1.6, 7.1.187, 7.3.39; *Brahmāṇḍa* 2.27.

¹³⁸ *Vāmana* 43.52; *Darpadalana* 7.68.

¹³⁹ *Yāgīśvaramāhātmya* 27b.

¹⁴⁰ *Kūrma* 2.39.2–5, 2.38.60.

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resolution may at first result not in a successful embodiment of both aspects but rather in the achievement of neither one. Menā, the mother of Pārvatī, scorns Śiva because he is penniless and makes love to Pārvatī constantly¹⁴¹—that is, she sees him as a bad husband (poor) and a bad yogi (lascivious) rather than as a good husband (virile) and a good yogi (indifferent to material objects). Similarly, Dakṣa does not see Śiva as one thing or another:

“He is not primarily an ascetic, for how can an ascetic bear weapons as he does? And he cannot be counted among the householders, for he lives in a burning-ground. He is not a *brahmacārin*, since he has married, and how could he be a forest-dweller, since he is deluded with pride in his supreme lordship [and a forest-dweller must give up all material ties]? He belongs to none of the four classes, and is neither male nor female [because he is an androgyne]; and he certainly cannot be a eunuch, for his *liṅga* is an object of worship.”¹⁴²

A similar objection to Śiva’s unique behavior in the Pine Forest is the basis of the sages’ curse: “This is not the kind of behavior proper for householders like us; nor is it the manner of those who are fond of chastity, nor of those who dwell in the forest. It is not the *dharma* for ascetics, either; it is not done anywhere.”¹⁴³ The problem underlies the statement made by the Seven Sages to test Pārvatī: There are two kinds of pleasures in the world, mental and physical. Śiva, being a disgusting beggar, is of no use for pleasures of the body, and, being inauspicious because of his necrophilic associations, he cannot even satisfy the longings of the mind.¹⁴⁴

It is frequently said against Śiva in the myths that he is a bad, or even a false, ascetic because of his involvement with Pārvatī. The demon Jālandhara mocks Śiva: “How can you live on alms and yet keep the beautiful Pārvatī? Give her to me, and wander from house to house with your alms bowl. You have fallen from your vow. . . . You are a yogi; what need have you for the gem of wives? You live in the woods attended by goblins and ghosts; being a naked yogi, you should give your wife to one who will appreciate her better than you do.”¹⁴⁵ This sexual involvement makes Śiva vulnerable to his enemies and reduces his ascetic powers. The combination of roles works against him in the opposite

¹⁴¹ *Vāyu* 2.30.32.

¹⁴² *Skanda* 4.2.87.29–35.

¹⁴³ *Brahmaṇḍa* 2.27.28–29.

¹⁴⁴ *Matsya* 154.330–39; *Padma* 5.40.322–33; *Haracarita* 9.96–100.

¹⁴⁵ *Padma* 6.11.45–47, and 49, 6.11.25–26, 6.101.19–20; *Skanda* 2.4.17.18–19; *Śiva* 2.5.19.8–9.

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way as well: a number of texts point out that, being an ascetic, Śiva is a somewhat unsatisfactory husband.¹⁴⁶ As Śiva himself puts it: "I am the greatest of the eleven Rudras, the lord of yoga; how can I take a beautiful wife, a woman who is the very form of Illusion? Any yogi ought to regard every woman as if she were his mother; I am a yogi; how can I marry a woman, my mother?"¹⁴⁷

In addition to the classical problems of the married yogi, Śiva has certain other problems due to his immortality. This particularly complicates the knotty problem of the son of the ascetic:

Pārvatī wished to have a natural son, but Śiva said, "I am not a householder, and I have no use for a son. The wicked gods presented me with a wife, but a wife is the most useless thing for a man who is without passion. Offspring are a noose and I will have none. Householders have need of a son and wealth; for them, a wife is necessary for the sake of a son, and sons are necessary to give the oblations to the ancestors. But I never die, and so I have no need for a son; when there is no disease, what use is medicine?" Still Pārvatī insisted, "What you say is true, but nevertheless I wish to have a child. When you have begotten a child, you can return to your yoga. I will take care of the son and you can be a yogi as you wish. I have a great desire for the kiss of a son's mouth, and since you have made me your wife you should beget a child upon me. If you wish, your son will be averse to marriage, so that you will not establish a whole lineage."¹⁴⁸

Thus a son is avoided by Śiva for the very reason that mortals usually need one: for the sake of immortality through progeny.†††† The conflict cannot be resolved in cycles, as Pārvatī attempts to do in suggesting that the son will be chaste to make up for the sexual lapse of the father, because this involves the very chain of rebirth from which Śiva, as the epitome of the yogi, has divorced himself and of which he, as a god, has no need. Nor can it be solved simply by the shorter phases of sex and yoga which alternate in the life of Śiva†††† (as she suggests, after begetting the child he may return to yoga, as he does after the birth of Skanda), for, as a mythological and symbolic figure, Śiva is *simultaneously* yogi and husband. In this particular instance, the solution is the creation of a magical, unnatural child for Pārvatī, as the mortal solution was often the birth of an illegitimate child from the unnaturally shed seed of the yogi.

This conflict leads to many quarrels between Śiva and Pār-

¹⁴⁶ Śiva 2.2.16.41 and 44, 2.3.36.12, 2.3.27.32; Skanda 1.1.35.27-34, 1.1.22.67-81, 2.25.59-66.

¹⁴⁷ Bhaviṣya 3.4.14.40-43.

¹⁴⁸ Brhadharma 2.60.7-51; cf. Haracarita 9.175-84.

†††† See Part I, Section B8.

†††† See below, Section I.

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vatī¹⁴⁹ in which she frequently berates him for his antierotic behavior. When she asks him why he has burnt Kāma, he answers lamely that it was not he who burnt Kāma, but merely his third eye.¹⁵⁰ At other times she teases him: "You did *tapas* for a long time in order to obtain me as your wife; then why did you destroy Kāma? When Kāma has been destroyed, what use have you for a wife? This is an act of a yogi [not of a husband], to destroy Kāma. . . . If you take no sexual pleasure in me, how have you managed to make love to me? But sexual pleasure cannot make you happy, for you burnt Kāma to ashes."¹⁵¹ She holds his asceticism responsible for the antierotic turn of mind that leads him to insult her sexual pride. Her resentment of his *tapas* is reflected in the belief that South Indian yogis, snake charmers, and scavengers "account for their condition as resulting from a curse that was imposed because of some slighting remarks made regarding Parvatī's breasts."¹⁵²

3. THE RECONCILIATION OF ŚIVA AND PĀRVATĪ

The quarrels are an important part of the mythology of Śiva and Pārvatī, in part because they demonstrate the conflict between the aspects of Śiva, but also because, in the Hindu view, quarrels, violence, and separation enhance rather than mar a sexual relationship.¹⁵³ The quarrels of Śiva and Pārvatī bring about a hiatus in their sexual union that makes it possible for them to replenish their powers by means of *tapas*.§§§§ Then, reconciled, they can apply those powers to the process of procreation. In the cyclic view, therefore, the quarrel is ultimately a sexual stimulus. This is most graphically illustrated by the solution of one argument: "As Śiva and Pārvatī quarreled, the uproar from that quarrel burst through the ground and became a *liṅga*. The gods named it the *Liṅga* of the Lord of Quarrels, and whoever worships it is for-

¹⁴⁹ Edward J. Thompson and Arthur Marshman Spencer, *Bengali Religious Lyrics, Śākta* (Calcutta: Association Press; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), Nos. XCII, C, XCVI, XCVII; *Padma* 4.110.248-69; *Subhāṣitaratnaḥa* Nos. 34 and 59; *Kumārasambhava* 8.49-51; *Hālāsyamāhātmya* No. 57; *Skanda* 5.2.40.17-19; Dinesh Chandra, Sen, *History of Bengali Language and Literature* (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1911), pp. 245, 248.

¹⁵⁰ *Saura* 54.4.

¹⁵¹ *Mahābhāgavata* 23.5-8; *Śiva* 7.24.33-35.

¹⁵² G. W. Briggs, *Gorakhnāth and the Kānphati Yogis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 57.

¹⁵³ *Subhāṣitaratnaḥa*, part 22, vss. 700-751; *Kāmasūtra* II.4-5; E. C. Dimock, Jr., *The Place of the Hidden Moon; Erotic Mysticism in the Vaiṣṇava Sāhajyā Cult of Bengal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 212.

§§§§ See below, Section I.

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ever free from quarrels in his house."¹⁵⁴ The quarrel produces the symbol of sexual union which explicitly prevents quarrels, a most concise example of the workings of cyclic Śaiva mythology.

When Śiva quarrels with Pārvatī in his ascetic aspect, he reunites with her in his erotic aspect.¹⁵⁵ But the rapprochement may come about from the opposite direction as well: Śiva may remain an ascetic and Pārvatī may come to accept him in this aspect. Though she often berates him for lacking a house during the rainy season,¹⁵⁶ she consents to go with him above the clouds to avoid the rain;¹⁵⁷ she comes to accept the clouds and mountains as a more wonderful kind of house than the conventional one. Her attachment to Śiva is unconventional, and incomprehensible to her parents,¹⁵⁸ but it is not without cause. Just as she desires him because he has destroyed Kāma, so she loves him for the very reasons that are cited against him: "Bhola [the fool, a name of Śiva] is ever laughing and weeping and knows no one save me. He is always eating hemp, and I must stay near him. I cannot keep from worrying . . . about this madman."¹⁵⁹ The funeral ashes on his chest, the third eye in his forehead, the matted locks through which the river Ganges flows, the snakes which adorn him everywhere, the bloody elephant skin wrapped around his chest, or his nakedness—all may transcend their conventional and literal repulsiveness and exert a magical erotic power. When Śiva, in disguise, reviles himself before her to test her,¹⁶⁰ he means it ostensibly as a deterrent to her love for him, but there is in all the wine and wildness which he seems to censure the Dionysian quality of life that strengthens her love even as he speaks of horrible things.

The ambiguous nature of Śiva's appeal is illustrated by a benedictory poem in which desire masquerades as fear:

"Whence comes this perspiration, love?"
 "From the fire of your eye."
 "Then why this trembling, fair-faced one?"
 "I fear the serpent prince."

¹⁵⁴ *Skanda* 5.2.18.31–34.

¹⁵⁵ Ethel Beswick, *Tales of Hindu Gods and Heroes* (Bombay: Jaico, 1959), pp. 106–7; *Skanda* 6.253.1–37, 6.254.1–104.

¹⁵⁶ *Brahma* 38.23–40; *Harivaṃśa* 1.29.37; *Brahmāṇḍa* 3.67.32–36; *Vāyu* 2.30.29–58; *Śiva*, *Jñānasamhitā* 14.22.

¹⁵⁷ *Śiva* 2.2.22.1–54; *Kālikā* 15.1–53; *Vāmana* 1.11–31.

¹⁵⁸ *Skanda* 1.1.23.1–19, 1.2.23.1–59, 7.2.9.24; *Śiva* 2.3.8.8–13, 2.3.9.5, 2.3.22.20–23, 2.3.31.1–52, 2.3.32.1–65, 2.3.30.26–54, 2.3.43.1–65, *Śiva*, *Jñānasamhitā* 16–18; *Bhāgavata* 4.2.11–16; *Brahmavaivarta* 4.40.71–111; *Haracarita* 9.39 and 43.

¹⁵⁹ Thompson and Spencer, *op. cit.*, No. XCVIII.

¹⁶⁰ *Skanda* 1.1.22.67–68; 1.2.25.59–66; *Śiva* 2.3.27.32; *Kumārasambhava* 5.62–73.

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“But still, the thrill that rises on your flesh?”
“Is from the Ganges’ spray, my lord.”
May Gauri’s hiding thus her heart
for long be your protection.¹⁶¹

Śiva’s horrible ornaments fascinate her, revealing the hidden desire in destruction, just as he shows, in the burning of Kāma, the destruction that may pervade desire.

4. ŚIVA AS HOUSEHOLDER AND ASCETIC

Thus the asceticism which seems at first to interfere with his life as a householder is seen to enhance it, and it is therefore not surprising that Śiva appears often as the householder par excellence.¹⁶² He is said to have married Satī and become a householder,¹⁶³ to have become incarnate as a householder,¹⁶⁴ to have married with the conventional rituals and to have lived as a householder with Pārvatī,¹⁶⁵ and to have envied Brahmā and Viṣṇu their married lives.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, though Śiva cannot have a conventional son, he is nevertheless capable of enjoying unconventional pleasures of paternity. Little Kumāra plays with the cobra that serves Śiva as a necklace, counting his hoods or fangs with childish inaccuracy—“one, three, ten, eight”—so that Śiva and Pārvatī laugh.¹⁶⁷ Kumāra romps among all the ascetic accouterments:

May Guha [Skanda] save you from misfortune,
who rolls at will upon his father’s chest
until his limbs are whitened from the funeral ash;
who from the headdress then dives deep into the Ganges
at the coldness of whose stream he cries aloud,
till trembling and with chattering teeth
he holds his hands before the blazing eye.¹⁶⁸

In another verse, the horrible ornaments are used as toys or “mistaken” for toys, in the Sanskrit convention, quite transcending the natural contrast between the hideous and charming aspects of the objects:

He touches the garland made of skulls
in hope that they are geese

¹⁶¹ *Subhāṣitaratnakōṣa* No. 75.

¹⁶² G. S. Ghurye, *Gods and Men* (Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1962), p. 31; Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

¹⁶³ *Śiva* 2.2.1.19.

¹⁶⁴ *Śiva* 3.13–15.

¹⁶⁵ *Mahābhāgavata* 12.17.

¹⁶⁶ *Kālikā* 10.26–28.

¹⁶⁷ *Skanda* 1.1.27.107–8; *Subhāṣitaratnakōṣa* No. 95.

¹⁶⁸ *Subhāṣitaratnakōṣa* No. 92.

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and shakes the crescent moon with eagerness to grasp
a lotus filament.
Thinking the forehead-eye a lotus flower,
he tries to pry it open.
May Skanda thus intent on play
within his father's arms protect you.¹⁶⁹

In this manner, the ascetic and householder meet in Śiva without contradiction or compromise, though not without a certain amount of conflict. This tension, expressed by the mythology in terms of marital discord and unnatural children, is ultimately obviated by the attitude of Pārvatī, as it is accepted in the mind of the worshiper, through *bhakti*, a deep love for the god, transcending all reason. The Purāṇas abound in explicit statements of Śiva's reconciliation of the two roles: "When Śiva became incarnate as the Rudra on Kailāsa mountain, he was a yogi, free from any emotions; he then became a householder, marrying the best of women. Though he was an ascetic, he married her, herself an ascetic, at the importunity of Viṣṇu."¹⁷⁰ This importunity is described in detail:

Kṛṣṇa summoned Śiva and said, "Marry the Goddess." Śiva smiled and said, "I will not take a wife like any natural man. A woman is an obstacle to knowledge and salvation, an instrument of lust and delusion. I do not want a household wife; I wish to remain free of all enjoyments and sexual pleasures." Kṛṣṇa said, "You are the greatest of ascetics and yogis; but now you must marry and enjoy erotic pleasures for a thousand years. You must not be merely an ascetic; in time you will be a householder and a man of *tapas* as you wish. And only an evil woman brings the misery that you see in union with a wife; not a chaste woman. Satī will be your wife, and men will worship your *liṅga* placed in the *yoni* of the Goddess."¹⁷¹

Kṛṣṇa here convinces Śiva to avoid being "merely" an ascetic or a householder. The argument—that a virtuous wife is a boon and only a wicked woman a burden—is used against Śiva by the Pine Forest sages, who try to convince him that his wife must be abandoned because she is unchaste, while they wish their own "chaste" wives to remain with them.¹⁷²

Without any feeling of contradiction, the devotee sees in Śiva the realization of all possibilities: he is an ascetic and a householder at once; of course he is the eternal *brahmacārin*; and he is a forest-dweller in all those myths in which he performs *tapas* with Pārvatī. A passage similar to Dakṣa's diatribe against Śiva appears in a hymn in praise of Śiva: "You are not a god or a

¹⁶⁹ *Subhāṣitaratnaṅga* No. 91.

¹⁷⁰ *Śiva* 2.2.1.3–5.

¹⁷¹ *Brahmavaivarta* 1.6.1–40.

¹⁷² *Kūrma* 2.38.25–32.

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demon, nor a mortal, nor an animal ; you are not a Brahmin nor a man nor a woman nor a eunuch.”¹⁷³ Even the accusations of Dakṣa and the sages are based not on the absence of any particular requirement for any particular stage, but rather on the presence of qualities from another stage which seem to conflict with the stage in question. He does not lack asceticism, but he has weapons as well ; he does not lack a wife, but he lives in the burning-grounds (rather than in a house) as well.

The stages of life meet in two ways in the mythology of Śiva : Pārvatī herself brings elements of the householder ethic into the world of asceticism when she leaves her father’s palace to marry Śiva, and he introduces elements of *tapas* into the tradition of married life by accepting her. This mirrors the symbiotic relationship of conventional and ascetic thought in the actual social order. Both Śiva and Pārvatī transgress the normal social order to unite the superficially opposed elements of *tapas* and *kāma* that are reconciled in the religious sphere and that, by implication, ought to be combined in ordinary life as well. The opposition on the mortal level is between the two goals : it is best to be a holy man, to give up all sensual pleasures, and it is best to beget sons, to fulfil one’s duties to society. This is of course a problem known to other cultures as well, but in Hinduism it is exaggerated, because nowhere on earth are passionless sages more venerated and nowhere are the ties of family and progeny, strengthened by caste strictures and the importance of rituals for the dead, more compelling. Man himself must be both procreative and ascetic ; so god must be the most ascetic of ascetics, the most erotic of lovers. He resolves the paradox in his own character by embodying a philosophy found throughout Hinduism : that chastity and sexuality are not opposed but symbiotic, that the chaste man is procreative by virtue of his chastity, and that the man who lives happily with his wife is performing a sacrament in his very life—if he but realizes it.

I. CYCLES OF SEXUALITY AND ASCETICISM IN ŚIVA

The social phases embodied in the four-stage system appear on the cosmic level as a constant, cyclic readjustment in the forces of *tapas* and *kāma*, a waning and waxing of powers that can never be

¹⁷³ *Śiva* 2.2.15.61; cf. *MHB* XIII.17.56; Nilakaṇṭha on *MHB* XIII.17.58 (Bombay).

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dispersed or destroyed, but only transmuted into one another. This interplay begins with the basic Hindu belief that ascetic power is destroyed by any sexual influence.¹⁷⁴ || || || Śiva himself is susceptible to this loss of his ascetic powers, and for this reason he destroys Kāma. When he enters his procreative phase, he is not immediately reduced in any way, for his ascetic powers *are* sexual powers. But eventually his powers are drained, and he must pass on to the next phase of the cycle :

After marrying Pārvatī, Śiva made love to her for a thousand years, but then he lost all of his *tejas* and his virility. Seeing himself thus diminished, Śiva resolved to perform *tapas*, and he undertook a great vow. . . . He said to Pārvatī, "My dear, the vow that I performed before gave me powers which I have now exhausted, for I lost my ascetic merit by making love to you day and night. Now I must again enter the forest and perform *tapas*."¹⁷⁵

Even without the specific tradition of asceticism, Śiva must perform *tapas* in order to regain his lost powers in his role of vegetation god. As the representative of the powers of nature, he must, like nature itself, replenish from time to time the energies which he has spent.¹⁷⁶ Śiva exhausts his powers when he succumbs to Kāma. He then returns to his *tapas*, but, as the cycle continues, the *tapas* that he performs gives him still greater sexual powers than he had before the confrontation, just as Kāma himself is eventually magnified by his battle with Śiva.

1. TAPAS AS EXPIATION

Tapas is able to restore not only sexual power but moral power as well ; a part of the traditional expiation for sexual sins is the performance of vows of asceticism.¹⁷⁷ When Śiva wishes to seduce the wife of Bhadrāyu and Bhadrāyu protests that by so doing he will incur great evil, Śiva replies, "I can scatter with my *tapas* the sin of the slaughter of a Brahmin or the drinking of wine ; so what is the seduction of another man's wife to me ? Give me your wife."¹⁷⁸ For this reason, the wanderings of Śiva as a Kāpālika, particularly

¹⁷⁴ Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 508; Manu 11.121-22; *Matsya* 3.39-40; 14.1-8.

|| || || See Part I, Section B1-2.

¹⁷⁵ Śiva, *Dharmasamhitā* 4.126-29; *Vāmana* 60.1-6.

¹⁷⁶ Jan Gonda, *Veda und älterer Hinduismus (Die Religionen Indiens, Vol. I [Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1963])*, p. 258.

¹⁷⁷ Manu 11.123; *Agni Purāṇa* (Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series No. 41 [Poona, 1957]), 169.18; cf. J. J. Meyer, *Sexual Life in Ancient India* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1930), p. 257n.; *MHB* XII.159.27 and .207.13; Manu 2.181-82, 11.106; *Vāyu* 1.18.7 and .14; commentaries cited by Georg Bühler (trans.), *The Laws of Manu* (Sacred Books of the East Vol. 25 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1886]), p. 452.

¹⁷⁸ Śiva 3.27.39-41.

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in the Pine Forest,¹⁷⁹ may be considered expiations for his well-known lustfulness, as well as for the acts of violence which are their ostensible cause.#### and his violation of the sages' wives is a re-enactment of the original sin which forced Śiva to undertake the expiation.¹⁸⁰ The tradition of *tapas* as expiation thus contributes to the image of the erotic ascetic; the women of the Pine Forest find the Kāpālīka particularly attractive, almost as if the very performance of his ascetic vow bears witness to his erotic vulnerability. One text states that Śiva must wander as a Kāpālīka with a skull in his right hand to replenish the powers lost by making love to Pārvatī.¹⁸¹ In the later texts, purification is automatic: "One who drinks wine or makes love to the wife of another man or kills a Brahmin or seduces his guru's wife is released from all sins by *tapas*."¹⁸² This is precisely the boast of Śiva to Bhadrāyū. The *tapas* which thus restores Śiva also leads eventually into the next cycle of erotic activity; when Śiva has married Pārvatī he carries her into the bedroom "with powers made great by his meditation,"¹⁸³ powers specifically said to be "an abundance of the qualities to achieve sexual intercourse."¹⁸⁴ Śiva is said to make love to Pārvatī particularly well because of his *tapas* and to be able to continue to do so for hundreds of years.^{185*****}

2. THE DANGEROUS EXTREMES OF CHASTITY AND SEXUALITY

As Śiva embodies the extremes of each aspect, he explores each one to its fullest, even absurd, extension. Though the net result of the myth is a balance, before that is achieved it may approach dangerous extremes in either or even both of its components. Both Śiva's sexuality and his chastity pose certain threats to the balance of the universe: his *tapas* generates great heat which menaces the world, like the *tapas* of any ascetic, until an *apsaras* (Pārvatī) is sent by Indra to disperse it.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, as Śiva embodies the

¹⁷⁹ G. Jouveau-Dubreuil, *Iconographie* (Vol. II, Archéologie du sud de l'Inde, Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1914), p. 32.

See above, Section F3.

¹⁸⁰ *Sāmba* 16.24-33; *Skanda* 5.2.8.1-5; cf. *Kūrma* 1.16.117-29; *Vāmana* 6.87.

¹⁸¹ *Vāmana* 60.6.

¹⁸² *Śiva* 5.12.45.

¹⁸³ *Kumārasambhava* 8.81.

¹⁸⁴ Mallinātha's commentary on *Kumārasambhava* 8.81.

¹⁸⁵ *Skanda* 1.1.27.31.

***** See Part I, Section D4, and cf. Part I, Section B4 and 5.

¹⁸⁶ Lieutenant Francis Wilford, "On Egypt and the Nile from the Ancient Books of the Hindus," *Asiatick Researches*, III (1792), 402, and "A Dissertation on Semiramus, the Origin of Mecca . . . from the Hindu Sacred Books," *Asiatick Researches*, IV (1795), 363 and 367.

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forces of nature, the universe ceases to function when he withdraws from worldly action. This is one of the implications of the Pine Forest myth, in which the universe is shattered when Śiva's *liṅga* falls. Another danger is that, as long as Śiva remains absorbed in meditation, he will be unable to undertake any functions such as creation or the killing of demons.¹⁸⁷ For these reasons, the gods object to his chastity and beg him to marry.

Yet the great majority of the Hindu myths depict Śiva's sexual activity as dangerous and his chaste aspect as a refuge; where sexual activity is motion and fire, chastity is quiescence and cool water. His auspicious form is chaste, while his terrible form destroys the universe.¹⁸⁸ His excessive sexual behavior weakens him so that he is unable to conquer demons, just as his excessive chastity places him *hors de combat*; his extreme devotion to his wife makes him a laughingstock.¹⁸⁹ But the greatest danger arising from his sexuality is the actual friction or heat generated by the activity itself, like the dangerous *tapas* of chastity; the effect of the extreme form of either of the opposed aspects is the same. When Śiva and Pārvatī make love, it is like a great, unwanted doomsday about to destroy the universe,¹⁹⁰ shaking the earth and the universe.¹⁹¹ The love making of Śiva and Pārvatī can also be dangerous for the opposite reason, like their chastity—not because it generates too much activity, but because it causes them to withdraw from all other activity, so that the universe is in danger of running down.¹⁹² While locked in Pārvatī's embrace, Śiva performs no sacrifice or *tapas*,¹⁹³ does nothing at all,¹⁹⁴ and deprives the gods of the sight of his person.¹⁹⁵ Even when the gods succeed in interrupting this dangerous act, they are left with the still more serious problem of the offspring of Pārvatī and Śiva, destined to be too powerful for the world to bear.¹⁹⁶ For this reason, Śiva's seed must be taken from him and used to generate a son else-

¹⁸⁷ *Vāmana* 21.10–18; *Kālikā* 4.7, 9.30, 5.68, *Śiva* 2.2.11.21–27, 2.2.16.8–19; V. S. Agrawala, *Śiva Mahādeva, the Great God: An Exposition of the Symbolism of Śiva* (Benares: Veda Academy, 1966), p. 12.

¹⁸⁸ *MHB* XIII.146.5–6; VII.173.94–97.

¹⁸⁹ *Padma* 6.11.7.

¹⁹⁰ *Skanda* 1.1.27.32.

¹⁹¹ *Śiva* 2.4.1.44–46; *Mahābhāgavata* 29.11; *Kathāsaritsāgara* 3.6.73.

¹⁹² From a tale current in the Punjab; personal communication from Dr. Chanchal Dhand of Jullundur.

¹⁹³ *Śiva* 2.2.22.68.

¹⁹⁴ *Śiva* 2.4.1.24.

¹⁹⁵ *Matsya* 158.29; *Skanda* 6.245.50–51, 6.246.1; *Kumārasambhava* 9.8.

¹⁹⁶ *Vāmana* 54.35–36; *Brahmānda* 3.10.23–24; *Kālikā* 48.12–24; *MHB* XIII.83.45; *Saura* 60.1–27; *Bṛhaddharma* 2.53.48–52; Dessigane *et al.*, *op. cit.*, No. 25, p. 35.

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where, diverting both the sexual heat of the couple and the martial heat of the son they would have had. Thus Śiva's *tapas* or his *kāma* may prevent the birth of a needed son or threaten to produce a dangerous son.

The forces of Śiva's chastity and sexuality can never be destroyed or turned back to their sources; the fire is never quenched, but its destructive power may be channeled into the next creative phase. Chastity develops into desire, and the fulfilment of desire leads to chastity. In Hindu terms, chastity builds up powers of *tapas* which are dissipated by sexual activity and then must be restored. When Śiva's chastity becomes extreme, he must be seduced by Pārvatī and Kāma, only to become excessively sexual and forced by the gods and Agni to become chaste again. Śiva himself varies his attributes in opposition to the qualities of other gods and sages, as if to set up a thermostatic control on their excesses, just as they do on his. *Tapas* and *kāma*, interchangeable forms of cosmic heat, replace and limit one another to maintain the balance of the universe.

3. PRAVRṬTI AND NIVṚṬTI

In some myths, *pravṛtti* (activity, worldly involvement) is contrasted with *nivṛtti* (quiescence, withdrawal), the former identified with sexual activity and the latter with asceticism. When Śiva ceases to create and becomes a pillar of chastity, he is said to have *nivṛtti* as his essence.¹⁹⁷ As an ascetic, he dwells in *nivṛtti* and shuns a wife, *pravṛtti*. His mind is quiescent (*nivṛttam*) when, after making love for many years, he is satisfied.¹⁹⁸

But, as both *tapas* and *kāma* are forces of energy, *pravṛtti*, together they may be contrasted with their true opposite: quiescence, *nivṛtti*. Although quiescence is what Śiva usually *teaches*, for it is the favorite path of the ascetic schools which he represents, *pravṛtti* is what he himself usually *embodies*, pure life energy. Thus, though he is said to go to the Pine Forest to teach the sages to leave *pravṛtti* and devote themselves to *nivṛtti*,¹⁹⁹ he does this by dancing in wild, naked abandon with their wives. Although he refuses to marry, saying that he delights only in *tapas* and *nivṛtti*, with no use for *pravṛtti* and the ways of mistresses,²⁰⁰ he does

¹⁹⁷ *Kūrma* 1.10.39.

¹⁹⁸ *Śiva* 2.2.16.31 and 35, 2.2.23.7.

¹⁹⁹ *Linga* 1.29.1-83, 1.31.21-45; *Kūrma* 2.38.2-6 and 129-31; cf. Rao, *op. cit.*, II, I, 302.

²⁰⁰ *Kālikā* 9.47; *Śiva* 2.2.16.30-35.

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marry and even indulges in numerous adulteries.²⁰¹ The famous dancing Śiva, Nāṭarājā, is the very embodiment of *pravṛtti*.

The cycles of his sexuality may to a certain extent be read in terms of Tantric philosophy. During the Tantric rite, the devotee exhausts the forces of *pravṛtti*, the outgoing path, and begins to cultivate *nivṛtti*.²⁰²††††† Śiva too must use both paths, must follow the outgoing path to prevent the accumulation of too great a power and then replenish that power by the path of *nivṛtti*. At Śiva's request, Brahmā substitutes for universal death the process of periodical action and quiescence.²⁰³ Śiva himself is said to be the source of both *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*,²⁰⁴ the force of life and perfect peace.

Yet quiescence in Śiva is not a negative force, an absence of power; it is the ultimate solution to the problem of cycles. For Śiva, unlike the mortal yogi, need not alternate phases of sexual activity and yogic restoration, but may exist in both states simultaneously. This is the meaning of the ithyphallic yogi: "In many of his icons, he [Śiva] is ithyphallic; often he appears with his consort. At the same time he is the patron deity of yogis, identified as such by his piled-up mass of uncut and uncombed hair, and by his nudity. This is not inconsistent with his sexual vitality. For the source of the yogi's power is his own divine sexuality, conserved and concentrated by asceticism."²⁰⁵ The ambiguous figure of the erotic ascetic is the only possible continuous manifestation of Śiva which can hold in suspension the two extremes of chastity and sexuality. The moment at which the two phases cancel each other out is the moment of *nivṛtti* in its broadest sense, the hiatus between the episodes of *pravṛtti*—chaste or sexual—an apparent calm which is in fact a perfectly balanced tension.

In many myths Śiva is merely an erotic or merely ascetic, as a momentary view of one phase or another. But in the great myths,

²⁰¹ *Skanda* 1.1.22.52; *Matsya* 155.31; *Brahma* 74.8–22; 75.31–50; *Brahmāṇḍa* 4.10.41–77; *Bhāgavata* 8.12.12–35; *Agni* 3.17–20; *Kālikā* 52.105–22; *Bhaviṣya* 3.4.17.67–78; *Śiva* 3.20.3–7; *Śiva*, *Dharmasaṃhitā* 10.32; Dessigane *et al.*, *op. cit.*, No. 59, pp. 76–77; Maity, *op. cit.*, pp. 79, 115, 120; Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 183; Dimock and Ramanujan, *op. cit.*, p. 304; Gustav Oppert, *On the Original Inhabitants of Bharatavarsha or India* (London: Westminster & Co., 1893), p. 508.

²⁰² *Tantra Rahasya*, cited by J. G. Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon), *Śakti and Śākta: Essays and Addresses on the Śākta Tantrasāstras* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1959), p. 150.

††††† See Part I, Section D4.

²⁰³ *MHB* VII, Appendix 1, No. 8, ll. 99–116.

²⁰⁴ *Śiva* 3.8.14; *MHB* XIII.17.32.

²⁰⁵ Philip Rawson, *Indian Sculpture* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1966), p. 48.

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transcending the limitations of mundane causality, he participates in cycles of cosmic dimensions which melt into a single image as they become ever more frequent, making an almost subliminal impression in their brief symbolic appearances, creating an infinitely complex mosaic which produces the ambivalent but not contradictory figure of the erotic ascetic. The conflict is resolved not into a static solution but rather into the constant motion of a pendulum, whose animating force is the eternal paradox of the myths.

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THE SUBMARINE MARE IN THE MYTHOLOGY OF ŚIVA

By WENDY DONIGER O'FLAHERTY

FIRE AND WATER ARE natural symbols, individually and in combination, in mythologies throughout the world. They assume a unique meaning in the Indian context, where tradition has attached particular significance to each element. Together, as an apparent conjunction of opposites, fire and water resolve some of the major paradoxes of Indian—especially Śaiva—mythology. The most striking instance of this symbolism is the image of the mare who wanders beneath the ocean, breathing fire.

1. *The background symbolism of fire and water in India.*

Fire is of course a natural image of energy, all the more compelling in a land in which heat is so intense as to become a constantly obtrusive image of power. More specifically, heat in Indian symbolism has two forms, mutually opposed: *kāma*, the heat of sexual desire, and *tapas*, the heat generated by ascetic practices, particularly by chastity. These two forces often meet and interact in the mythology: Kāma, the god of desire, once attempted to wound Śiva, the god of asceticism, with an arrow; this resulted in a fire called the flame of Kāma, composed of two sparks: the fire that Kāma kindled in Śiva and the fire from the third eye in Śiva's forehead, with which Śiva, enraged, burnt Kāma to ashes.¹ Other texts describe this battle between the two forms of fire and state that Śiva "extinguished" [*śamayām āsa*] Kāma's fire with the fire from his third eye.² Later in this myth, Śiva places his fiery seed in Agni, the god of fire;³ clearly, the cluster of overtones is explicitly utilized by the authors of these texts.

Water has certain obvious connotations in India—such as fertility, immortality, peace, and the female power of creation—but it is in conjunction with the more central image of fire that water is of particular significance. Thus, in the myth of Śiva and Kāma, Agni is unable to bear the seed of Śiva and places it in the river Ganges, whence Kumāra, the son of Śiva, is born. The image of fire in water is the ultimate resolution of oppositions; held in suspended union, each retains its full power and nothing is lost in compromise, but there is complete balance. In ritual, fire and water combine to burn away sinful elements and then to wash them away;⁴ Willibald Kiefel has pointed out the importance of the balance between fire and water in the human body in Hindu medical texts,⁵ as well as their symbolism of male and female, right and left, sun and moon.⁶ The ascetic yogi submerges himself in water in the winter and surrounds himself with fires in the

¹ *Matsya Purāṇa* (Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series 54; Poona, 1907), 154. 252.

² *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* (Bombay, Venkaṭeśvara Steam Press, 1959), 3. 4. 14. 53; *Śiva Purāṇa* (Benares, Paṇḍita Puṣṭakālaya, 1964), 2. 3. 19. 10.

³ *Mahābhārata* (Poona, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933–59), XIII. 83.53; *Kumārasambhava* of Kālidāsa (Bombay, Nirṇaya Sāgara Press, 1955), 10. 1–25.

⁴ C. Hooykaas, *Āgama-Tīrtha: Five studies in Hindu-Balinese religion* (Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Akademie der Wetenschappen LXX, 4), Amsterdam, Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1964, 109; F. D. K. Bosch, *The golden germ: An introduction to Indian symbolism*, The Hague, Mouton, 1960, 60–64.

⁵ Willibald Kiefel, *Die fünf Elemente insbesondere Wasser und Feuer: Ihre Bedeutung für den Ursprung altindischer und altemediterraner Heilkunde* (Beiträge zur Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte des Orients IV), Walldorf-Hessen, 1951, 16.

⁶ *ibid.*, 17.

summer;⁷ in the theory of yoga, the adept is said to achieve immortality by burning his body with the fire of Śiva and flooding it with the elixir of immortality of Śiva's wife.⁸ As far back as the Vedas, Soma (the elixir) and Agni (fire) are identified; Soma is described as a fiery liquor, or liquid fire.⁹

In Western thought, water brought to fire results in the extinction of fire; in India, the combination more often results in the burning up of the water. Indra, the Vedic king of the gods, is able to burn water dry,¹⁰ a power which is shared by the hosts of Śiva¹¹ and by Śiva himself.¹² The seed—fire—is more powerful than the womb—water;¹³ yet there are many notable exceptions, in which fire is quenched by water.¹⁴ The final balance is one of suspension: fire never dies, but is merely transformed or controlled, as uranium is by blocks of lead.

This balance of powers may be traced back to the Vedic conception of Agni in the waters. As Chauncey Blair has described it,

It is true that water is said at Rg Veda X.16.13 to extinguish excessive fire in the dead body, and to extinguish the excessive flame of jealousy and fever, but in general the concept of Agni in the waters does not imply destruction of Agni. He is merely hidden, a potential Agni, and no less capable of powerful action.¹⁵

Agni is said to be born in the waters,¹⁶ an image at the heart of the cosmogonic myth of the golden seed of Agni which ripens in the cosmic waters to hatch into the universe.¹⁷ Agni hides in the waters until the gods find him;¹⁸ this story is told at length in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, where Agni hides in a hollow reed¹⁹ (the birth-place of Kumāra from the seed of Agni-Śiva), and in the *Mahābhārata*, where it is said, "Agni hid in the waters of the watery Hell [*rasātala*]; these waters, heated by him, were released by (hot) mountain springs".²⁰ In many versions of this story, Agni is said to fear the waters, as in this inverted plot when Agni seeks Indra instead of hiding from him:

Agni searched for Indra, assuming the form of a woman. Finally, only the waters remained to be searched, and Agni was afraid to enter them, for fire is

⁷ *Mānavadharmasāstra*, ed. J. Jolly, Trübner, 1887, 6. 23; *Kumārasambhava*, 5. 20–26.

⁸ *Śiva Purāṇa*, 7. 1. 28. 19. I have discussed the general mythology of asceticism and sexuality in "Asceticism and sexuality in the mythology of Śiva", *History of Religions*, 8, 4, May 1969, 300–337.

⁹ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* of the White Yajur Veda, tr. Julius Eggeling (*SBE*, XII, XXVI, XLI, XLIII, XLIV), Oxford, 1882, Vol. 2, p. xii; Adalbert Kuhn, *Mythologische Studien. I: Die Herabkunft des Feuers und des Göttertranks*, Gütersloh, C. Bertelsmann, 1886, 161 ff.

¹⁰ *Rg Veda* [Rig-Veda Samhita] with the commentary of Śāyana, ed. Max Müller, William H. Allen, 1890–92, VI. 22. 8.

¹¹ *Śiva Purāṇa*, 3. 7. 37.

¹² *Mahābhārata*, X. 18. 21.

¹³ cf. *Mānavadharmasāstra*, 9. 35.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 9. 321; *Mahābhārata*, V. 15. 32; XII. 56. 24; *Devi Purāṇa* (Calcutta, Bāṅgabāsi Press, 1896), p. 30 (ch. viii, ll. 10–12); *Pañcatantra*, ed. Johannes Hertel (Harvard Oriental Series XI), 1908, II. 1. 24; *Padma Purāṇa* (Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series 131, Poona, 1893), 4. 103. 1–26; *Mahābhārata*, I. 16. 22–24; *Kumārasambhava*, 4. 43.

¹⁵ Chauncey Blair, *Heat in the Rig Veda and Atharva Veda* (American Oriental Society Publication 45), Cambridge [Mass.], 1961, 102.

¹⁶ *Rg Veda*, II. 1. 1.

¹⁷ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* of the White Yajur Veda, ed. Albrecht Weber (Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series 96), 2nd ed., Benares, 1964, II. 1. 6. 1 and 6. 1. 1. 10; *Mānavadharmasāstra*, I. 8–9; *Rg Veda*, X. 121.

¹⁸ *Rg Veda*, X. 51–53; cf. *Bṛhaddevatā*, ed. Arthur Anthony Macdonell (Harvard Oriental Series V), 1904, 7. 62.

¹⁹ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 6. 3. 1. 31.

²⁰ *Mahābhārata*, XIII. 84. 22–44; *Kathāsaritsāgara* of Somadeva (Bombay, Nirṇaya Sāgara Press, 1930), 3. 6. 74–80.

destroyed by water. "My *tejas* [fiery heat and light] which goes everywhere is extinguished in the waters which are its womb", he said. At last the gods strengthened Agni with magic spells and persuaded him to enter the waters.²¹

Agni's antipathy for water appears in another myth in which he hides in the waters but is found by the gods nevertheless; he then spits upon the waters and curses them for being an unsafe refuge.²² Elsewhere it is said, "When [the worshipper] throws Agni into the water he does what is improper; he now makes amends to him so that Agni may not injure him".²³

The opposing view, that fire is stronger than water, appears in another passage in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*:

King Māthava carried Agni in his mouth. He did not speak, fearing that Agni might fall from his mouth. A priest mentioned butter and Agni fell to the ground. Agni went burning along the river Sarasvatī and burnt up all the rivers until he reached the Sadānirā river flowing from Himālaya, and he dwelt east of that place.²⁴

Finally, the text explains the mutual interaction of the two powers: "Water is food; water produces food. Therefore he supplies the fire with food. Water, moreover, is female and Agni is male; so that he thereby supplies the latter with a productive mate."²⁵ Fire and water express the related appetites of hunger and desire, and are mutually productive.

2. Fire and water in the mythology of Śiva.

In later mythology, the ambiguous figure of Śiva combines the two powers: Śiva is in fire and in water;²⁶ he is born from the golden egg placed in the waters;²⁷ his terrible form is fire, while his auspicious form is water.²⁸ A Sanskrit poem expresses the interplay of fire and water in Śaṅkara (Śiva), who is said to have swallowed a deadly poison and to bear the crescent moon and the river Ganges on his head:

He who, though gifted with the power
to stomach deadly poison, to burn to ashes Love
and metamorphose doomsday's fire
to his glowing forehead-eye,
still bears the ambrosial moon,
the mountain daughter and the heavenly stream,
so wondrous is his skill of policy;
may he, great Śaṅkara, protect you.²⁹

Often, Śiva himself is merely Agni, and his wife—"the mountain daughter", Pārvatī the daughter of Himālaya—is Soma;³⁰ her task is to control either aspect of his fiery

²¹ *Mahābhārata*, V. 15. 27-32.

²² *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 1. 2. 3. 1.

²³ *ibid.*, 6. 8. 2. 8.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 1. 4. 1. 10-19.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 2. 1. 1. 3-4; 1. 1. 1. 18. 20-21.

²⁶ *Atharva Veda*, with the commentary of Sāyaṇa (Bombay, Government Central Book Depot, 1895), 7. 87. 1.

²⁷ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 6. 1. 1. 1-2, 8; 6. 1. 3. 1-4; 6. 1. 3. 8-10.

²⁸ *Mahābhārata*, XIII. 146. 4; *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* (Bombay, Venkaṭeśvara Steam Press, 1857), 2. 27. 106; cf. *Mahābhārata*, XIII. 146. 5-6; VII. 173. 94-97.

²⁹ *Subhāṣitaratnakōśa* of Vidyākara (Harvard Oriental Series XLII), 1957; tr. Daniel H. H. Ingalls (H.O.S. XLIV), 1965, §70.

³⁰ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2. 27. 112.

power: as a female ascetic (*yoginī*) she limits the fire of his lust, and as his mistress (*kāminī*) she regulates his asceticism.³¹ The latter is more frequently portrayed:

May the water of Śiva's sweat,
arising from Gauri's embrace,
which Kāma employs as his liquid weapon
when he fears the fire of Śiva's eye
protect you.³²

In many myths, Śiva's fiery lust is controlled by submersion in water. There is precedent for this in the Atharva Veda hymn which refers to the submersion of Kāma himself: "The love that the gods poured within the waters, greatly burning, together with longing—that I heat for thee by Varuṇa's ordinance".³³ The commentator Sāyaṇa interpreted this verse to mean that the gods poured Kāma into the water in order to quench him or, for his own benefit, to cure him of the fever of love; Maurice Bloomfield suggests that the gods did it to punish Kāma for his attacks upon themselves.³⁴ In either case, the fever of lust is controlled by water. The *Mahābhārata* draws the human parallel: "Let a man in whom passion has arisen enter the water".³⁵ Śiva begs Pārvatī to cure him in this way: "Draw me out of Kāma as if from a fire, and save me with the Soma of your body".³⁶ Yet here again, fire proves more powerful than water.

Śiva seeks relief in the waters of two rivers, just as Agni seeks relief from the fiery seed in the Ganges:

When Sati [the first wife of Śiva] had died, Śiva wandered about until Kāma wounded him with the arrow of madness. Śiva then fell into the Kalindī river and the waters were burnt up and became as black as collyrium. And still Śiva found no peace.

When Pārvatī departed to perform asceticism, as Śiva had instructed her to do, Śiva was overcome with desire. He wandered over the earth and sprinkled his body with water, but he was still tortured by desire and found no peace. One day he saw the Yamunā river and he plunged in, trying to assuage the torture of his fever, but the waters of the river became black by contact with the fire of Śiva's body.³⁷

In both of these myths it is clear that the water does not quench the fire but is burnt instead. A similar failure to extinguish the flame of Kāma is recorded in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*:

After Kāma had been burnt by Śiva and revived by the Goddess, he attacked Śiva with his arrows. Śiva abandoned his *tapas* and lost all control. Tortured by desire, sighing, heated, burning with Kāma's arrows, he could not assuage the heat of his body with the coolness of the crescent moon or the Ganges, nor by the Soma dripping from the crescent moon, nor by lying in snowy waters. He could not extinguish the flame of the bodiless Kāma in his body.³⁸

The unquenchable fire of Śiva appears in a more symbolic form in the myth of the Pine Forest, in which the sages dwelling in the forest castrate Śiva; his phallus, or *liṅga*,

³¹ cf. *Śiva Purāṇa*, 2. 2. 16. 39.

³² *Kathāsaritsāgara*, 2. 1. 1.

³³ *Atharva Veda*, VI. 132. 1.

³⁴ *Atharva Veda*, tr. Maurice Bloomfield (S.B.E. XLII), Oxford, 1897, p. 535.

³⁵ *Mahābhārata*, XII. 207. 13.

³⁶ *Kālikā Purāṇa* (Bombay, Venkaṭeśvara Steam Press, 1891), 45. 117.

³⁷ *Skanda Purāṇa* (Bombay, Venkaṭeśvara, 1867), 6, 258. 1-4; *Vāmana Purāṇa* (Benares, All-India Kashiraj Trust, 1968), 6. 27-33.

³⁸ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 4. 30. 65-89.

falls to the ground and blazes out of control, destroying all in its path, until the sages worship it. In one version of this myth, the *liṅga* comes to rest in a river;³⁹ in another, the sages beg Pārvatī to take the form of a *yoni* (the female sexual organ) to receive the *liṅga*, which they sprinkle with consecrated water in order to make it peaceful.⁴⁰ This is a reflection of actual cult practice; according to William Crooke, "the lingam of Mahādeva, a thirsty deity, who needs continued cooling to relieve his distress, must be kept continually moist to avoid drought".⁴¹ The Abbé Dubois described a similar practice of placing over the "idol" of Śiva a vessel filled with water: "In this vessel a little hole is pierced, so that the water may, by falling on him drop by drop, refresh him and abate the burning heat that consumes him".⁴² The ritual continues in present-day Hinduism, for the Goddess of the fever of smallpox is cooled with water and fanned with branches.⁴³ The flaming power of the idol is thus controlled but never quenched by the ritual immersion. Kālidāsa expressed this in a verse combining the symbols of Pārvatī as water and Śiva as fire with the central image of their balance: the mare at the bottom of the sea:

United with Pārvatī, Śiva passed the days and nights of a thousand years as if it were a single night. But the joys of love-making did not satisfy his thirst, just as all the floods of the ocean do not quench the fire blazing within.⁴⁴

3. The submarine doomsday fire.

The fire of doomsday is said to have the form of a mare (*vaḍavā*) at the bottom of the ocean; inextinguishable flames issue from her mouth. The destructive fire which cannot be quenched can at least be made to wait for the moment appropriate for destruction; the fire that blazes from Śiva's eye to burn Kāma is the fire of untimely doomsday, which yawns wide to burn up the universe until it is placed beneath the sea.⁴⁵ Agni Vaḍavā-vaktra (the fire of the mare's mouth) drinks the waters of the ocean and lets them out again; eventually this fire of the underworld will destroy the universe, at the end of an aeon.⁴⁶

Because of its destructive nature, the mare-fire is associated with the demon powers; the sage Urva (author of the fire) gave it to the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu, who used it to dispel Indra's magic darkness during a battle; Indra then sent Soma and Varuṇa (gods of water) to extinguish the demon magic of the fire.⁴⁷ The mare-fire is also associated with Death; in one myth it is said that the mare was a river, the Vaḍavā, which was given to Death as a wife; in gratitude to Śiva for this gift, Death established a great *liṅga* known as the Mahānala (the Great Fire) at the mouth of the Vaḍavā river.⁴⁸ (Here, in a reversal

³⁹ *Skanda Purāṇa*, 6. 259. 5.

⁴⁰ *Śiva Purāṇa*, with commentaries (Bombay, Ganpat Krishnaji Press, 1884), Jñānasamhitā 42. 27-32. (This edition will be cited by Samhitā name.)

⁴¹ William Crooke, *The popular religion and folklore of northern India*, 2nd ed., 2 vols., Constable, 1896, I, 76.

⁴² Abbé J. A. Dubois, *Hindu manners, customs and ceremonies*, tr. Henry K. Beauchamp, 3rd ed., Oxford, 1906, 553.

⁴³ B. E. F. Beck, "Social and conceptual order in Kongu" (Unpublished D. Phil. dissertation, Oxford, 1968), pp. 151-169.

⁴⁴ *Kumārasambhava*, 8. 91.

⁴⁵ *Śiva Purāṇa*, 2. 3. 19. 15; *Matsya Purāṇa*, 154. 251-2.

⁴⁶ cf. Harṣa's *Nāgānanda* (*Sri Harsha's plays*, Asia Publishing House, 1964), p. 203 (V. 22).

⁴⁷ *Harivamśa*, with commentary (Bombay, Lakṣmī-Venkaṭeśvara Steam Press, 1833-76), I. 45. 1-19; I. 46. 1-10.

⁴⁸ *Brahma Purāṇa* (Calcutta, Gurumaṇḍala Press, 1954), 116. 22-25.

of the usual symbolism, Death and the fire *liṅga* are not equated with the mare but are joined to her in opposition; she is water married to fiery Death.)

The mare-fire beneath the sea is a common image. In the *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, the universal fire is said to be the open mouth of the sacrificial horse in the sea;⁴⁹ a commentary on the lawbook of Manu says, "Fire is born of water, as is seen in the case of lightning and the (submarine) mare-fire".⁵⁰ It is frequently used as a metaphor for a voracious or insatiable energy: "Not by anything can the fire of enmity be assuaged; it is inextinguishable, like the submarine fire".⁵¹ The mare is considered a particularly apt metaphor for the insatiable appetites of a flirtatious woman;⁵² but it stands equally well for passion in a man: a character in the *Prabodhacandrodaya* boasts that he has crossed the ocean of passion, escaped from the whirlpool of affection, and dispelled the mare-fire of anger.⁵³

The mare-fire appears in the myth in which Śiva cuts off the fifth head of Brahmā, the Creator; in one version, the head is said to be a horse-head, and in another the demon of brahminicide who pursues Śiva after the beheading is likened to the fire of the mare;⁵⁴ the ocean fears that, if the terrible head is placed within him, he will be burnt dry (*śoṣaṃ yāsyē*).⁵⁵ When the Goddess instructs her servant to drink up the inexhaustible flood of the demon Raktabija's blood, she says: "Open your mouth and drink his blood as if your mouth were the fire of the mare".⁵⁶ In one version of the myth of the churning of the ocean, the mare-fire emerges from the sea immediately before the terrible Kālākūṭa poison which threatens the gods until Śiva swallows it;⁵⁷ the poison is merely another aspect of the destructive fire waiting to come forth from the sea. The poison and the fire appear together in this verse:

The goddess Śrī is fickle, . . .
and the kālākūṭa is a deadly poison.
It is pondering these vices of his family
that burns the ocean's heart,
and not the underwater fire.⁵⁸

The circle of the sun surrounded by clouds in the rainy season is likened to the mare's head in the ocean,⁵⁹ a simile made more appropriate by the Indian belief that the sun's horses place his chariot in the Western ocean at night.⁶⁰ The sun, which emerges from the clouds to destroy the universe at doomsday, is an obvious prototype for the mare-fire. The image of the mare is often used to emphasize the greatness of the ocean;⁶¹ the element of latent power is beautifully expressed in a verse from a Prakrit epic which

⁴⁹ *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, 1. 1. 2, in *One hundred and eight Upanishads*, 4th ed., Bombay, Nirṇaya Sāgara Press, 1932.

⁵⁰ Rāghavan on *Mānavadharmaśāstra*, 9. 321.

⁵¹ *Mahābhārata*, XII. 137. 41.

⁵² *Śiva Purāṇa*, 5. 24. 29; *Mahābhārata*, XIII. 38. 25-29.

⁵³ *Prabodhacandrodaya* of Kṛṣṇamiśra (Bombay, Nirṇaya Sāgara Press, 1898), VI. 8.

⁵⁴ *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*, 1. 22. 14 and 16; *Skanda Purāṇa*, 3. 1. 24. 30-67.

⁵⁵ *Brahma Purāṇa*, 113. 13.

⁵⁶ *Vāmana Purāṇa*, 30. 27.

⁵⁷ *Skanda Purāṇa*, 1. 1. 9. 90.

⁵⁸ *Subhāṣitaratnaśoṣa*, §1045; Ingalls translation.

⁵⁹ *Śiva Purāṇa*, 2. 2. 22. 10.

⁶⁰ cf. *Kumārasambhava*, 8. 42.

⁶¹ cf. *Pañcatantra*, V. II. 32.

describes the ocean stirring the submarine fire like a lion that roars and shakes his mane in rage when he is roused from deep sleep by being pierced by an arrow.⁶² A Sanskrit verse magnifies both the ocean and the mare, depicting once again the perfect balance of fire and water:

How marvellous the underwater fire!
 How marvellous the blessed sea!
 The mind grows dizzy thinking of their greatness.
 The first keeps drinking greedily its dwelling
 and yet its thirst by water is not quenched;
 the other is so great it never suffers
 the slightest loss of water in extent.⁶³

4. *The fiery mare: Saṃjñā and the control of tejas.*

The particular form that the fire assumes—a mare—is by no means as whimsical as it may at first appear. In Vedic religion, the horse rather than the bull or cow was the sacred animal, the sacrificial animal, and the mare in Hindu mythology is associated with all the concepts central to the submarine fire.

The horse is an image of fertility. The Vedic Creator, Prajāpati, assumed the form of a stallion to pursue his daughter when she fled in the form of a mare.⁶⁴ In the ancient horse sacrifice, the *aśvamedha*, the sacrificer's wife pantomimed copulation with the consecrated stallion,⁶⁵ and Brhaspati, author of the Cārvāka heresy, mocked the Vedic ritual in which "the sacrificer's wife takes the phallus of the horse".⁶⁶ That the *aśvamedha* had connotations of sexuality, as well as fertility, for the ancient Indians is clearly evident from the *Harivaṃśa* episode in which Indra, overcome by desire for Kāśyā (the wife of King Janamejaya), enters into the stallion consecrated for the sacrifice and unites with the queen during the ritual.^{66a} Some aspects of this ritual seem to have survived in later Hinduism, for medieval friezes and miniature paintings depict ritual orgies or scenes in which a woman is mounted by a stallion.⁶⁷ A particular connexion between the *aśvamedha* and the Vaḍavā fire may be seen in the later belief that the submarine fire devours the offerings of the horse-sacrifice.⁶⁸ The *aśvamedha* ritual is probably of Indo-European origin; the ancient Irish king was "expected to enter into matrimonial relations with a mare".⁶⁹ The fertility and potency of the horse was enhanced by special ritual laws requiring him to abstain from sexual intercourse during the year preceding the ceremony;⁷⁰ this ritual chastity remains in many of the myths of the Vaḍavā. The head of the horse is particularly sacred and potent; throughout Sanskrit myth and poetry there appear

⁶² *Rāvana Vaha* or *Setubandha*, with commentary (Kāvya-mālā 47, 1895), V. 34.

⁶³ *Subhāṣitaratnakōṣa*, §1198, Ingalls translation. cf. §1210–1212.

⁶⁴ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1. 4. 4.

⁶⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: immortality and freedom*, tr. Willard R. Trask (Bollingen Series LVI), New York, Pantheon, 1958, 256; Paul Émile Dumont, *L'Āśvamedha: Description du sacrifice du cheval*, Paris, Société Belge d'Études Orientales, 1927, 260 ff.

⁶⁶ Mādhava, *Sarvadarśanasamgraha* (Bibliotheca Indica), pp. 6–7.

^{66a} *Harivaṃśa* (Bombay, 1927), 3. 5. 11–17.

⁶⁷ Kanwar Lal, *The cult of desire*, 2nd ed., Luxor Press, 1967, pl. 45 (Tirupakeśa Temple, Mysore); Philip Rawson, *Erotic art of the East*, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1968, pl. 121 (miniature painting, Deccan, 18th century). Pl. 67 depicts a man with a mare (Khajūrāho, 10th century).

⁶⁸ Hooykaas, op. cit., 109; citing *Kauravasrama*, 78.

⁶⁹ J. Gonda, *Ancient Indian kingship from the religious point of view*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1966, 141.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 23; cf. *Śāṅkhayāśrautasūtra*, 16. 1. 15; *Baudhāyanaśrautasūtra*, 15. 8.

celestial musicians named Aśvamukhas or Kinnaras (Horseheads or What?-men), with human bodies and horse-heads (occasionally vice versa); their women are erotically described.⁷¹ Horse-headed women appear on an erotic frieze at Aihole, apropos of which Philip Rawson remarks, "The horse-headed female [Yakṣa] is a familiar Indian night-time bogey, who carries men off for sexual purposes".⁷² A horse-faced Yakṣiṇī of Buddhist mythology was in the habit of eating the men she captured, until she fell in love with one whom she forced to marry her; another Buddhist Yakṣiṇī, a beautiful mare named Vaḷavāmukhi, with a white body and red feet, was pursued by king Paṇḍukābhaya and plunged into a pond; he grasped her mane, subdued her, and rode her into battle.⁷³ The motifs of beauty and flight into water are typical of Vaḍavā mythology.

The most famous mare in Indian mythology is the Vedic Saṃjñā, whose story is also the great myth of the channelling of sexual fire. The myth is told briefly in the Ṛg Veda, expanded in the *Bṛhaddevatā*, and told at length in several Purāṇas.⁷⁴ The basic story appears in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*:

Saṃjñā, the daughter of Viśvakarman (the architect of the gods), was the wife of the Sun. Unable to bear his fiery power [*tejas*], she made an image of herself and went to the forest to perform *tapas*. The Sun mistook the image for Saṃjñā and begat three children in her, but eventually he learned that the true Saṃjñā had gone away. By means of the eye of meditation and *tapas*, the Sun saw that Saṃjñā had taken the form of a mare to do *tapas*; he changed himself into a stallion and begat upon her the twin Aśvins ("Horsemen"). He brought Saṃjñā back to his own palace, where Viśvakarman placed him on his lathe and trimmed away the excess *tejas*. The parts that he discarded were made into the discus of Viṣṇu, the trident of Śiva, and the weapons of other gods.⁷⁵

In other Purāṇas, certain details are different: the Sun's *tejas* is a threat to the entire world, not only to Saṃjñā;⁷⁶ and certain sequences are reversed (even after he has been trimmed on the lathe, the Sun is unacceptable to Saṃjñā, who leaves him after the birth of the Aśvins).⁷⁷ In some versions, the stallion's seed is placed in the mouth of the mare,⁷⁸ like the fire in the mouth of the Vaḍavā. But the basic elements of the myth are preserved: the unbearable fiery power of sexuality; the practice of asceticism; and the role of the mare.

The myth of Saṃjñā is linked to Śiva by the belief that Śiva's own creative-destructive *tejas*, released when he was castrated in the Pine Forest, was placed in the sun;⁷⁹ in return, Śiva receives from the sun in this myth a portion of that same destructive *tejas* to make his weapon, the trident. (Other scraps from the trimming of the sun are said to have been used to build the great temple of the sun at Konarak; built in the form of a horse-drawn chariot of the sun, and covered with erotic friezes, this temple furnishes yet another link

⁷¹ *Kumārasambhava*, 1. 11.

⁷² Rawson, op. cit., pl. 42. I am indebted to Dr. J. C. Harle of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, for calling my attention to similar reliefs on temples 7 and 9 at Aihole.

⁷³ *Padakūśalamānava Jātaka* (§ 432); *Mahāvamsa*, 10. 53–62 (W. Geiger ed.).

⁷⁴ Ṛg Veda, X. 17. 1–2; *Bṛhaddevatā*, 6. 162; 7. 1–6; *Harivaṃśa*, 1. 9. 1; *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (Bombay, Venkaṭeśvara, 1890), 103; *Śiva Purāṇa*, 5. 35. 1–41; *Padma Purāṇa*, 5. 8. 46–72; *Śiva Purāṇa*, Dharmasamhitā 11. 53–66.

⁷⁵ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (Gorakhpur, Gītā Press, 1962), 3. 2. 2–12.

⁷⁶ *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, 103. 1–65; 104. 1–11; 105. 1–16.

⁷⁷ *Śiva Purāṇa*, Dharmasamhitā 11. 53–66.

⁷⁸ *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, *Śiva Purāṇa* Dharmasamhitā, *Bṛhaddevatā*.

⁷⁹ *Śiva Purāṇa*, Dharmasamhitā 49. 78–81.

between sexual fire and the horses of the sun.) Moreover, Śiva, like the Sun, is said to have difficulty in finding a wife capable of bearing his *tejas*.⁸⁰

5. *The symbolism of the horse.*

Connotations of fertility persist in the mythological figure of the mare. Lakṣmī, the wife of Viṣṇu and daughter of the ocean, follows in the footsteps of Saṃjñā:

Viṣṇu cursed Lakṣmī to become a mare because she had lusted for Revanta (the child of Saṃjñā and the Sun) when he was mounted on the marvellous horse Ucchaiṣravas. Viṣṇu promised that she would be released from the curse when she had a son. Lakṣmī went to the very place where Saṃjñā had wandered as a mare, performing *tapas*, at the confluence of the Kalindi and Tamasā rivers. Lakṣmī, the daughter of the ocean, meditated upon Śiva and did *tapas* for a thousand years, taking the form of a mare; then Śiva came to her and promised that Viṣṇu would appear to her in the form of a stallion and beget a son upon her. Śiva vanished and sent Viṣṇu to Lakṣmī; he begat a son upon her, stallion mounting mare; they resumed their normal forms and returned home, giving the son to a king who had performed *tapas* to obtain him.⁸¹

This reworking of the myth of Saṃjñā retains the mare theme in association with the familiar motifs: the sun, the horse of the sun, the ocean, the horse born from the ocean (Ucchaiṣravas), the mare performing *tapas*, and the birth of a son.

In South India today, horses are dedicated to Aiyandar, the son of Śiva, and are worshipped together with the *liṅga*.⁸² The horse is a natural symbol of power as well as of fertility, an aspect which was surely strengthened by the fact that the horse-drawn chariot gave the Indo-Aryans the decisive advantage in their invasion of the Indian sub-continent; for the Vedic Indians, the horse was the emblem of war. Centuries later, the Upaniṣads likened the senses to horses that must be controlled or else will become vicious and wild;⁸³ and a mendicant said to the Buddha, "The senses of others are restless like horses, but yours have been tamed. Other beings are passionate, but your passions have ceased."⁸⁴ Martial power is replaced by spiritual power; we have already noted how the mare-fire is symbolic of appetites that are difficult to tame. Even in its domesticated form, the horse remains wild and liable to revert to wildness; yet it can be tamed until it becomes merely a farm implement or an instrument of battle.

A striking example of the early association of the horse with the taming of wildness, as well as with fire and water, may be seen in a passage of the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* in which the four Vedas compete over the taming of a wild horse; the horse is referred to as "she", although no word for mare is used, and the verb used to represent her taming is the same as the term for the extinguishing of a fire or a passion—*śam*. Finally, the Atharvan, the tamer, prepares the waters of tranquillity which he sprinkles over the horse; flames shoot forth from every limb of the animal, who is henceforth perfectly tame.⁸⁵ The horse is tamed as the flame *liṅga* of Śiva is later controlled, by submersion in water

⁸⁰ *Śiva Purāṇa*, 2. 2. 16. 38.

⁸¹ *Devibhāgavata Purāṇa* (Benares, Paṇḍita Puṣṭakālaya, 1960), 6. 17–19.

⁸² Stella Kramrisch, *Unknown India: Ritual art in tribe and village*, Philadelphia, 1968, 56.

⁸³ *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 3. 4–6.

⁸⁴ Āśvaghoṣa, *Buddhacarita*, XV. 1–7, 13, from Tibetan translations; cited by Edward Conze, *Buddhist scriptures*, Penguin Books, 1959, 53.

⁸⁵ *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* (Bibliotheca Indica, 1872), 1. 2. 18; p. 35.

The horse is specifically associated with the ocean and with fire, the two elements of the submarine mare. In the Rg Veda, fiery horses draw the chariot of the sun; the flames of Agni are his bay chargers.⁸⁶ The seven daughters of the sun are the seven bay mares that pull his chariot, the seven sisters who attend the fiery Soma drink.⁸⁷ Agni appears in the Rg Veda as a horse; he changes himself into a horse in order to deceive the demons.⁸⁸ Prajāpati takes the form of a white horse to seek Agni when he hides from the gods; when Prajāpati enters the water in this form, Agni burns the horse's mouth,⁸⁹ furnishing yet another instance of the combination of essential motifs of the Vaṇavā-vakra fire.

The connexion between the horse and fire is clear and natural; the link with the ocean is less obvious but equally well-established. The Greeks sacrificed horses to Poseidon,⁹⁰ and Celtic mythology describes aquatic monsters known as Goborchinn or horse-heads, as well as horse-eels and water horses. In the Vedas, the horse is sacred to Varuṇa, the god of the waters,⁹¹ and the ocean is the womb of the horse.⁹² Stella Kramrisch has discussed this belief:

The ancient Aryans sacrificed a horse to Varuṇa, the god of the fertilizing waters. In hymnic intoxication, they knew the horse as Varuṇa (Rg Veda I. 163. 1). To the South Indian Dravidian peasant of today, this hymnic realization of the fiery animal, the horse, of the fiery spark of life that is in the waters, of the fire that at daybreak seems to arise from the waters as the glowing sun and sinks into their darkness and dies, has become uncannily one with the power of Aiyānar and also with the eery, fatal Seven Virgins.⁹³

Other myths about horses still retain the same elements in different permutations: demons, the ocean, the sun, and the taming of the horse:

The winged white horse Uccaiḥśravas, born from the ocean when it was churned, was taken by the demon chief for his own riding animal. The gods, jealous, implored Prajāpati to give them horses too; he created four classes and many sub-castes of horses for them. Dakṣa, a son of Prajāpati, considered the winged horses a nuisance and cursed them to live on earth without their wings. Thenceforth they were ridden by gods and men.⁹⁴

The myth of the submarine mare appears in the Kulu Valley in the form of a legend of a mare who had drowned in a sacred lake in the Himalayas, gaining thereby certain healing powers.⁹⁵ (In this context it is interesting to note that the Aśvins are the physicians of the gods.) The tamed horse, retaining its power but in a harnessed form, is a perfect symbol of the controlled force of fire under water.

⁸⁶ Rg Veda, VIII. 72. 16; I. 35. 3; I. 164. 47; II. 11. 6; V. 6. 6.

⁸⁷ Rg Veda, I. 50. 8-9; IX. 86. 36.

⁸⁸ Rg Veda, I. 58. 2; 149. 3; 60. 5; II. 4. 4.; 5. 1; III. 2. 7; 27. 3; 27. 14; etc.; *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, with the commentary of Śāyana (Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series 32, Poona, 1896), 15. 5. 1-7.

⁸⁹ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 7. 3. 2. 14.

⁹⁰ cf. *The Ocean of Story (Kathāsaritsāgara)*, tr. C. H. Tawney and ed. N. M. Penzer (10 vols.), 1924, IV, 14-16.

⁹¹ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 5. 3. 1. 5; 6. 2. 1. 5; etc.

⁹² *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* of the Black Yajur Veda, with the commentary of Mādhava (Bibliotheca Indica, Calcutta, 1860), 7. 5. 25. 2; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 5. 1. 4. 5.

⁹³ Kramrisch, op. cit., 57.

⁹⁴ *Mahābhārata*, I. 16. 34-36; cf. Nakula, *Aśvaśāstra*, quoted in *Lakṣaṇaprakāśa*, p. 407; cf. V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, *War in ancient India*, 2nd ed., Macmillan, 1948, 175.

⁹⁵ *Kulu, the happy valley* [by T. Tyson], Chandigarh, Punjab, 1956, 92. I am indebted to Penelope Chetwode for this reference.

6. *The myths of search: Dadhyañc and Sagara.*

The horse-head is connected with the myths of the seeking of fire and the seeking of Soma, perhaps because of the natural image of swift flight which the horse suggests. Moreover, since the horse is an essential part of the Soma sacrifice, its image is associated with the drinking of Soma in the Vedas just as the submarine mare is the great drinker of water:

Dadhyañc, through a horse's head, told (the Aśvins) (the place of) the mead (Soma). The Aśvins gave a horse's head to Dadhyañc and Dadhyañc told them (the place of) the hidden mead . . . Indra with the bones of Dadhyañc slew nine times ninety (or ninety-nine) enemies; as he sought the head of the horse, which was hidden in the mountains, he found it in Śaryaṇāvat.⁹⁶

A clearer version of the first part of this myth appears in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*:

Dadhyañc knew (the secret of) the mead and the secret of the sacrifice: how the head of the sacrifice is put on again and becomes complete. Indra threatened to cut Dadhyañc's head off if he told this secret to anyone. The Aśvins asked him to tell them the secret and made this provision: they first cut off his head and laid it aside, then placed the head of a horse on his neck, and then he told them the secret through the horse-head. Indra cut off that head, the Aśvins brought back his own head and restored it, and all was well.⁹⁷

"The head of the sacrifice" is the head of the sacrificial horse; the elixir of immortality, Soma, revives the sacrificial animal, as the ocean waters feed the fiery head.

Sāyaṇa sheds some light on the second half of the Vedic myth:

When Dadhyañc died, he left behind the horse's head. The gods sought it and found it in Lake Śaryaṇāvat, a lake in Kurukṣetra. With the bones of this head, Indra slew the demons.⁹⁸

It is interesting to note that Sāyaṇa describes Śaryaṇāvat as a lake, the traditional watery bed of the fiery horse-head. The elements of this obscure myth recur throughout the corpus of fire-water myths. The Aśvins who give the horse-head (and the Soma) are the sons of the mare Samjñā; the seeking of the horse-head by Indra is the seeking of fire hidden in water; and the bones of Dadhyañc appear in Purāṇic mythology as the bones of Dadhici, which are a direct cause of the birth of the submarine mare. The search for Soma and for fire, the Sun's search for his wife—all are associated with the flight of the horse.

The seeking of the horse-fire itself is the central theme of the myth of Sagara, which appears in several slightly different versions:

King Sagara had two wives. In order to obtain sons, he performed *tapas* for a hundred years; then, by the favour of Śiva [or by propitiating Aurva, the author of the submarine fire] he obtained 60,000 sons from one wife and one son, named Aṃśuman, from the other. After some time, the king performed an *aśvamedha* sacrifice; as the horse wandered over the earth, protected by the king's sons, it reached the ocean which was at that time empty of water, and there it disappeared. [Or: it was snatched away by a wave as it wandered by the ocean. Or: Indra took the form of a demon and stole the horse, for Indra was jealous of his own reputation as giver

⁹⁶ Rg Veda, I. 116. 12; I. 117. 22; I. 84. 13–14.

⁹⁷ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 14. 1. 1. 18–25.

⁹⁸ Sāyaṇa on Rg Veda, I. 84. 13–14.

of horse-sacrifices.] The king sent his 60,000 sons to search for the horse; they dug with spades in the earth, destroying many living creatures, digging out the ocean which is the abode of sea-demons. They reached down into Hell, and there they saw the horse wandering about, and they saw the sage Kapila there haloed in flames, blazing with *tapas*. The sons were angry and behaved disrespectfully to Kapila; in fury, he released a flame from his eye and burnt all the sons to ashes. Then Amśuman came and propitiated Kapila and obtained the horse, with which Sagara completed his sacrifice. Sagara made the ocean his son, called Sāgara. The ocean took the horse and worshipped with it, and he became the ocean. Years later, after Sagara's death, Bhagiratha, the grandson of Amśuman, propitiated Śiva and the Ganges; the Ganges fell from heaven to earth, breaking her fall upon Śiva's head, and she flowed over the ashes of the 60,000 sons, reviving them.⁹⁹

The submarine mare appears in many forms in this myth: first, as the power—Śiva or the sage Aurva—who grants the sons as a reward for asceticism; then as the horse that vanishes into the ocean (taken by Indra, the one who sought the horse-head of Dadhyañc) to be churned out of it again, like Uccaiḥśravas; then as the submarine fire of Hell blazing from the eye of Kapila, as it blazes from the eye of Śiva; and finally as the ashes of the sons, revived by the floods of the Ganges just as the seed of Śiva is engendered there or the fire of his lust assuaged there. The sage Aurva, creator of the submarine fire, is further connected with the myth of Sagara by the tradition that Aurva was preceptor to Sagara and gave him the fire with which Sagara conquered the barbarians.¹⁰⁰ This fire weapon is the same mare-fire which Aurva gave to the demons.

The same elements appear arranged more briefly and simply in the story of the demon Dhundhu:

King Bṛhadaśva had a thousand sons, of whom Kubalāśva was the eldest. When the old king handed over his throne to Kubalāśva and entered the forest, he met the sage Uttanka, who told him that a demon named Dhundhu was performing great *tapas* there by his hermitage, in the sands of the ocean, burning like the doomsday fire with flames issuing from his mouth, causing the waters to flow about him in a whirlpool. Bṛhadaśva asked Kubalāśva to subdue the demon; he and the other sons dug down into the sand, but Dhundhu appeared from the ocean, breathing fire, and he burnt all but three of the sons with his power of *tapas*. Then Kubalāśva drank up the watery flood with a fiery arrow, and he quenched the fire with water; and he killed the demon Dhundhu, burning him up.¹⁰¹

The end of the myth expresses the final balance of the powers: the fire is quenched by water, but the water is "drunk" by fire. Clearly this is an abbreviated form of the Sagara story, centring upon the burning of the king's sons by a submarine fire; the image of the horse seems to be omitted from the Dhundhu story, but it appears in the form of the names of the kings: Bṛhadaśva ("Possessing great horses") and Kubalāśva ("Possessing fodder horses"). Moreover, the *Mahābhārata* explicitly connects the two stories: "Dhundhu

⁹⁹ *Śiva Purāṇa*, 5. 38. 48–57; *Liṅga Purāṇa* (Calcutta, Baṅgabāsi Press, 1890), 1. 66. 15–20; *Vāyu Purāṇa* (Bombay, Venkatesvara, 1867), 2. 26. 143–178; *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 3. 46–53; *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 4. 4. 1–33; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Gorakhpur, Gītā Press, 1962), 9. 8. 1–31, 9. 9. 1–15; *Rāmāyana* of Valmiki (Bālakhanda, Baroda, Oriental Institute, 1960), 1. 38–44; *Mahābhārata*, III. 104. 6–22; 105. 1–25; 106. 1–40; 107. 1–25; 108. 1–19.

¹⁰⁰ Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English dictionary*, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1899, 239.

¹⁰¹ *Mahābhārata*, III. 192–195; *Vāyu Purāṇa*, 2. 26. 30–60; *Śiva Purāṇa*, 5. 37. 1–36.

burnt the sons of Kubalāśva with the fire from his mouth, just as formerly Kapila burnt the sons of Sagara".¹⁰²

More explicitly, Dhundhu is related to the submarine mare by this myth:

The two demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha stole the Vedas and took them to the Hell beneath the great ocean. Brahmā told Viṣṇu what had happened, and Viṣṇu took a horse-headed form and entered Hell. He took the Vedas back to Brahmā and then he resumed his own form, leaving the horse-head in the ocean as the dwelling of the Vedas. Then he killed Madhu and Kaiṭabha, who were the parents of Dhundhu. Viṣṇu himself is the horse-head that lives in the ocean, devouring oblations.¹⁰³

Thus Dhundhu, the submarine fire, is the very form which Viṣṇu assumes in order to kill the parents of Dhundhu, who have stolen the Vedas (as the Soma and horses are stolen in other myths); and Dhundhu is in turn killed by the fire-and-water weapons of a "horse" (Kubalāśva).

7. The origin of the submarine mare-fire: Aurva.

The submarine fire is often called the fire of Aurva or Ūrva, from the name of the sage whose anger is its source. The Ṛg-Vedic occurrences of these terms, though sparse, incorporate almost every element of the Purāṇic myth of the Vaḍavā fire—the underworld, the ocean, fire, cattle, insatiable desire, and, in later Vedic mythology, the hungry horse set free.

The primary meaning of the term (which may perhaps be derived from *urú*, "broad", or *vr*, "to enclose", and is a possible doublet of *ūlba*, "womb-membrane") seems to be "cavern". Often, as in the myths of Uṣas (Dawn), Vala, and the cows, the cavern is specifically one in which cattle are kept.¹⁰⁴ From this primary meaning may be derived the later associations with demons (the underworld) and horses. The secondary meaning of *ūrvā* in the Ṛg Veda, according to Louis Renou, is the ocean;¹⁰⁵ Hermann Grassmann narrows this down to "Seebecken" and considers it the primary meaning;¹⁰⁶ Hermann Oldenberg considers the two concepts to be combined in the idea of the waters as herds.¹⁰⁷ In particular, the *ūrvā* is the part of the ocean into which many rivers flow; here it is interesting to note that the later mare-fire usually arises at the confluence of a river and the ocean. Sāyaṇa glosses *ūrvā* in this context as the Vaḍavānala in the ocean, used as a metaphor for the fire of lightning inside a cloud.¹⁰⁸

Another important connotation of the mare-fire appears in a Ṛg-Vedic verse which likens the desire of the worshipper to the *ūrvā*;¹⁰⁹ Sāyaṇa remarks that the Vaḍavānala is here a metaphor for unsated desire; Oldenberg points out the aptness of the *ūrvā*, a wide, empty space, in this context. Elsewhere, the *ūrvā* is the *yóni*, the source—be it of waters or of cattle—¹¹⁰ and Heinrich Lüders further interprets it as a name of the

¹⁰² *Mahābhārata*, III. 195. 25.

¹⁰³ *Mahābhārata*, XII. 335. 1–64; III. 193. 16; XII. 335. 5, 44, 54 ff.

¹⁰⁴ Ṛg Veda, IV. 12. 5, etc. I am indebted to Professor J. C. Wright for bringing *ūlba* to my attention.

¹⁰⁵ Louis Renou, *Études védiques et paniniennes*, III, 7, and XIV, 102.

¹⁰⁶ Hermann Grassmann, *Wörterbuch zum Rig-Veda*, Wiesbaden, 1955, s.v. Ṛg Veda, II. 13. 7; II. 35. 3; III. 30. 19.

¹⁰⁷ Hermann Oldenberg, *ZDMG*, LV, 1901, 316–321.

¹⁰⁸ Ṛg Veda, II. 35. 3; Sāyaṇa: *ūrvam samudramadhye vartamānam vaḍavānalam . . . vaidyutāgnirūpeṇa meḥ vartamāno . . .* Cf. clouds as water-holders called *ūrvā*: Ṛg Veda, III. 1. 16, IV. 50. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Ṛg Veda, III. 30. 19; Sāyaṇa: *ūrva iva anavāptakāmo vaḍavānala iva*.

¹¹⁰ Ṛg Veda, IV. 50. 2. The *ūlba* doublet may be significant here.

divine life-source in which the sun and the dawn remain during the night;¹¹¹ this gloss, though somewhat elaborate, is nevertheless well supported by the symbolism of the myths of Uṣas and the cows in the cavern. From here it is an obvious step to the Purāṇic notion of the doomsday fire waiting underneath the ocean.

Two more Vedic occurrences add still other essentials of the later myth. Agni himself is associated with two sages named Aurva and Bhṛgu, and in the very same verse is said to be the Agni who dwells in the ocean;¹¹² Bhṛgu is the grandfather of Aurva in later mythology, and already in the Ṛg Veda both are associated with the fire in the ocean. The *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* adds to this cluster of ideas the final element: Agni who dwells in the ocean is called *ūrvā* and symbolized by a horse who had been yoked but is now set free so that he can eat ghee and take his place in the ocean.¹¹³ The horse, tamed and set free, devouring the oblations (the waters of the ocean), is the mare-fire.

Vedic elements persist in the Purāṇa myths. F. D. K. Bosch has discussed at some length the "inverse order" and "inversion" of the Dadhyaṇic myth and the myth of Aurva,¹¹⁴ and parallels between the two are clear. A brief prediction of Aurva's birth appears in the *Mahābhārata*:

A sage named Aurva will be born, blazing like a fire, and he will create a fire of anger to destroy the three worlds and reduce the earth to ashes. After some time he will extinguish [*samayīṣyati*] the fire, throwing it into the mouth of the mare in the ocean.¹¹⁵

The myth is expanded and rationalized elsewhere in the Epic:

The sage Aurva was born from his mother's left thigh, blazing with anger toward the Warrior class who had destroyed his family and his father. He performed *tapas* in order to destroy the worlds and the people. His great *tapas* heated all the gods, and the Fathers begged him to be merciful and to control his anger. Aurva said, "My vow of anger cannot be in vain, or I could not live. Undispersed, my anger would burn me as fire burns a forest, if I were to restrain it with my own *tejas*." The Fathers said, "Release it into the waters if you like, and, since the waters are the people, this will fulfil your vow to burn the people". So Aurva placed the fire in the ocean, and it became the horse-headed fire, which vomits fire from its mouth and drinks the waters of the ocean.¹¹⁶

Aurva states the problem of the dispersal of excess destructive ascetic power: he cannot take it back, as Śiva cannot take back the fire from his eye, and so it must be placed in the one situation in which it can do no harm: under water. The problem of dispersal is explicitly the central point of the myth in the *Mahābhārata*, which tells it to the sage Parāśara in order to persuade him to dispose in a similar manner of his own destructive wrath;¹¹⁷ the Epic here introduces the Aurva story as a conscious multiform.

¹¹¹ Heinrich Lüders, *Varuṇa*, Göttingen, 1951 (I) and 1959 (II), 328, on Ṛg Veda, V. 45. 2. Cf. also pp. 121-7 ("Die unterirdische Wasserflut und die Urwasser"), 294-307 ("Die Sonne im Wasser"), and 688-691 ("Die sieben Rosse der Sonne").

¹¹² Ṛg Veda, VIII. 102. 4.

¹¹³ *Taittirīya Saṃhitā*, 5. 5. 10. 6.

¹¹⁴ F. D. K. Bosch, "The god with the horse's head", in *Selected studies in Indonesian archeology*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1961, 144-5; cf. R. H. van Gulik, *Hayagrīva*, Utrecht, Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie, 1935.

¹¹⁵ *Mahābhārata*, XIII. 56. 4-6.

¹¹⁶ *Mahābhārata*, I. 169. 16-26; 170. 1-21; 171. 1-23.

¹¹⁷ *Mahābhārata*, I. 172. 1-17.

The Brāhmaṇa concept of water as food for fire is central to the myth, as is the theme of the seduction of an ascetic to disperse his *tapas*; the gods persuade Aurva to abandon his vow and to place his *tejas* (i.e. his seed) where it will cease to generate heat, in water (i.e. in a woman). The importance of chastity in this context is indicated by a more explicit description of the *tapas* involved in the birth of Aurva:

The sage Ūrva was performing *tapas*; the gods asked him to stop and begin family life. He replied "This is the eternal *dharma* of sages to live in the forest in a hermitage, practising chastity. I will not take a wife, but I will create a son nevertheless." Then by his *tapas* Ūrva placed his thigh in the fire and churned it; a halo of flames broke out of his thigh and became a son, named Aurva.

Aurva blazed so fiercely that he terrified the universe; he said, "Hunger binds me: I will eat the universe". He grew great, burning all creatures, until Brahmā said to Ūrva, "Restrain your son's *tejas*, for the good of all people. I will give him a dwelling-place and a food like Soma; he will dwell in the mouth of the mare in the ocean, and he will live upon an oblation of water. This water-eating fire will burn all creatures at the end of the aeon." "So be it", said Ūrva, and he threw the fire into the ocean.¹¹⁸

In this version, Aurva is personified as the son of Ūrva, rather than an elemental fire; and his blaze of hunger is directly derived from the *tapas* of his father's chastity, a force which becomes dangerous when it is released to become productive.

The *Skanda Purāṇa* tells another myth of Aurva's birth, related to the Vedic tradition of the horse-head of Dadhyañc:

The gods placed their weapons in the hermitage of Dadhici for safe-keeping, and Dadhici made them into liquid and drank their essence. One day Subhadrā, his wife, put on his loin-cloth for a menstrual cloth, and she became pregnant with the seed that was on the cloth. When she brought forth a child, she cursed the father, in ignorance, saying, "I swear by my chastity: let the man who engendered this child die". At this time the gods returned to take back their weapons; and Dadhici abandoned his body so that the gods could make their weapons of his bones.

When Subhadrā learned that Dadhici was the father of her child, she rejoiced; but the child, named Pippalāda, wished to kill the gods who had killed his father. He went to Himālaya and did great *tapas* to propitiate Śiva; he churned his left thigh with his left hand and from it a mare appeared, followed by a stallion. The mare was covered by the stallion, brought forth a child, and disappeared. Pippalāda then told the child to devour the gods. The gods sought help from Viṣṇu, who tricked the fire-child into eating the gods one by one, beginning with the waters. The mare-fire, haloed in flames, asked to be brought to the waters, and no one but Sarasvatī could bear the fire.

As Sarasvatī carried the fire to the waters, a mountain saw her and asked her to marry him; she refused, and he threatened to abduct her by force. She then agreed to marry him if he would hold the mare-fire while she bathed; he did so and was burnt to ashes. She took up the fire and set out again for the ocean.

When they reached the ocean, the mare-fire was full of joy and offered Sarasvatī a boon; she said, "Promise that you will drink the waters through a mouth no larger than a needle". Then she threw the fire into the ocean, and Viṣṇu tricked the mare-fire, and this is the story of the birth of the Aurva fire.¹¹⁹

Although the story refers to the Aurva fire, Aurva does not appear; he is replaced by

¹¹⁸ *Matsya Purāṇa*, 175. 23–63; *Harivaṃśa*, 1. 45. 20–64.

¹¹⁹ *Skanda Purāṇa*, 7. 1. 32. 1–128; 7. 1. 33. 1–103; cf. *Padma Purāṇa*, 6. 148. 27 ff.

Pippalāda and given a complex reason for his destructive fervour: revenge for the death of his father replaces his fierce chastity. Pippalāda appears elsewhere as an incarnation of Śiva,¹²⁰ and Śiva himself appears here, as in the *Mahābhārata* story, as the one who makes possible the birth of the fire-child. The story of Dadhici's bones is connected with the horse-head of Dadhyañc in the Ṛg Veda, but this connexion is submerged in the *Skanda Purāṇa* and seems to have little to do with the birth of Pippalāda except to supply the motive for his anger. The image of the mare, which is introduced only as an after-thought at the end of the *Mahābhārata* story of Aurva and is absent entirely from the story of Ūrva, appears here in an awkward and elaborate form unrelated to the horse-head of Dadhici-Dadhyañc. The role of chastity is transferred in this version from Ūrva himself to the two women in the myth: the mother of Pippalāda, who swears by her chastity, and the bearer of the fire, Sarasvatī, whose steadfast chastity enables her to fulfil her role and dispose of the fire. The tricking of the lustful mountain by Sarasvatī is a multiform of the double trick played upon the chaste mare-fire: first, to make the fire drink the waters, and then to reduce the size of the mouth to a needle (which, with Viṣṇu's gift to the ocean of inexhaustible waters, supplies an explicit rationalization of the eternal balance of food [water] and eater [fire]).

Sarasvatī's place in the myth is clear; like the Ganges and the ocean, she is the only receptacle for the fire. This is the role that she plays in the control of Śiva's fire as well; for when he went to do *tapas*, after making love to Pārvatī for 1,000 years, he plunged into the Sarasvatī river for a year and a half.¹²¹ In anthropomorphic form, she is the daughter with whom Brahmā commits incest, stallion pursuing mare. The sexual nature of the fire-water episode may be seen in the fact that when the fire is placed in the ocean (which is masculine), it is a mare; but when it is placed in Sarasvatī or the Ganges (which are feminine), it is considered to be masculine; even in the Pippalāda myth where it is born from a mare, a stallion is introduced as well, and the resulting child is masculine.

The plight of Sarasvatī is elaborated upon in the *Padma Purāṇa*, which here omits the whole story of the origin of the mare-fire:

Formerly the gods said to Sarasvatī, "You must take this mare-fire and throw it into the ocean of salt so that the gods will be free of fear; otherwise the mare-fire will burn everything with its *tejas*". Sarasvatī asked her father, Brahmā, what she should do, and Brahmā asked her to protect the gods. She wept bitterly, but she set out, accompanied by Yamunā and Gāyatrī, and she went to Uttāṅka's hermitage. There she received the fire in a golden pot and took it to the ocean.¹²²

Nothing is said of the origin of the fire; but it comes from the hermitage of Uttāṅka, the place from which the submarine fire of Dhundhu originates, and there may be a confusion between the two myths here. But the *Brahmā Purāṇa* retells this same episode in a version of the story of Pippalāda and Dadhica (*sic*) which gives a more specific rationalization of the presence of the mare in the story:

Pippalāda the son of Dadhica performed great *tapas* in order to kill the slayers of his father. When he was able to see the third eye of Śiva, he gained from Śiva

¹²⁰ *Śiva Purāṇa*, 3. 24-25.

¹²¹ *Vāmana Purāṇa*, 34. 18-20.

¹²² *Padma Purāṇa*, 5. 18. 159-198.

the power to kill the gods. The pippala (fig) trees said, "Your mother was said to be a mare", and when Pippalāda heard this he became angry, and from his eye an evil spirit came forth blazing in the form of a mare with a deadly tongue; she had the form of a mare because he had been thinking of a mare. He told her to eat the gods, but she began to eat him, since he had been made by the gods; in terror, Pippalāda fled to Śiva, who told the spirit not to take any creature within the distance of a league from that place. Then the mare set out full of fire to burn the universe, terrifying the gods, who sought refuge with Pippalāda; but Pippalāda could not restrain the mare. As she came to the confluence of the Ganges, she was implored by the gods to begin with the waters of the ocean and then to devour everything. The fire said, "How can I reach the ocean? Let a virtuous maiden place me in a golden pot and lead me there." The gods asked the maiden Sarasvatī to do this, and she asked them to join her with four other rivers, the Yamunā, Ganges, Narmadā, and Tapatī. The five rivers put the fire in a golden pot and brought it to the ocean; they threw it into the ocean and it began to drink the waters little by little.¹²³

The fire is called a mare until the chaste maiden and the rivers are first mentioned; thenceforth, it is called a fire (masculine), placed in the golden pot which is the receptacle of the golden seed of Śiva and submerged in the Ganges like that seed.¹²⁴ Śaiva imagery is strong throughout this version: Pippalāda becomes able to see Śiva's third eye and then produces the fiery mare with his own eye;¹²⁵ the gods then beg Śiva to protect them from the mare created by the fire of *his* eye,¹²⁶ and clearly the two eyes function as one, just as Pippalāda and Śiva are one. The theme of chastity plays a part here, too; the slur against Pippalāda's mother (a mare being perhaps equivalent to a bitch or at least an over-sexed woman, as is its connotation in the *Kāmasūtra*¹²⁷) is reminiscent of the mother's own fears of her chastity in the *Skanda Purāṇa* version; and the chastity of Sarasvatī—implicit and important in that version—is here made explicit: only a maiden can carry the fire.

Śiva participates in the action of the myth in symbolic forms more often than he appears anthropomorphically. But he plays a more important role in the *Varāha Purāṇa* version of the myth:

The sage Aurva performed *tapas* until he began to burn the universe. The gods were frightened; and so one day while the sage was doing *tapas* Śiva looked in anger upon Aurva's hermitage and burnt it up. When Aurva saw that it had been burnt, he said, "Let the one who has burnt this hermitage be burnt by sorrow and wander over the world". And so Śiva himself was burnt by a great fire and wandered without finding rest. Finally he went with Pārvatī to Aurva, who promised that Śiva would be released from the curse if he performed the ritual of bathing a host of cows; and he did so and was cured.¹²⁸

Aurva's curse of an unknown enemy, like Subhadrā's unwitting curse of her own husband, results in the creation of a fire. Śiva is both the immediate source of this fire—burning the hermitage with his third eye and causing havoc as the demon Dhundhu caused havoc in Uttanka's hermitage—and its first receptacle; he wanders in torture as he wanders under the influence of Kāma's fire. Finally, he is released from his pain by a ritual of

¹²³ *Brahma Purāṇa*, 110. 85–210.

¹²⁴ *Śiva Purāṇa*, Dharmasaṃhitā, 11. 28–35.

¹²⁵ *Brahma Purāṇa*, 110. 124.

¹²⁶ *Brahma Purāṇa*, 110. 136.

¹²⁷ *Kāmasūtra* of Vātsyāyana (Bombay, Venkaṭeśvara, 1856), 2. 1. 1 and commentary.

¹²⁸ *Varāha Purāṇa* (Bibliotheca Indica, Calcutta, 1893), 147. 1–27.

bathing not himself, as in many myths in which he plunges into a river, but a cow, the animal which had by this time replaced the horse as the sacred animal of fertility. The fire which haunts Śiva retains its erotic connotations even in this myth; for Pārvatī must be present when Śiva is cured, as she is in the Pine Forest.

8. *Śiva as the mare-fire beneath the sea.*

In some texts, Śiva engenders the mare-fire with the blaze of his third eye. Certain descriptions of the battle between Śiva and Kāma allow Śiva to restrain or distribute in various ways the fire of anger which has reduced Kāma to ashes;¹²⁹ but as this fire is expressly said to be the fire of doomsday, there is one inevitable resting place for it: the ocean.

Kāma deluded Śiva, arousing him, and when Śiva realized that Kāma was attacking him he released a fire from his third eye, burning Kāma to ashes. The fire, having come from Śiva's eye, could never return to Śiva; moreover, Brahmā had paralyzed the fire in a vain attempt to shield Kāma. When Śiva had vanished, the fire began to burn the gods and all the universe. The gods sought refuge with Brahmā, who made the fire of Śiva's anger into a mare with gentle [*saumya*] flames issuing from her mouth. Then Brahmā took the mare to the ocean and said, "This mare is the fire of Śiva's anger; having burnt Kāma, it wishes to burn the whole universe. I gave it the form of a mare; now you must bear it until the final deluge, at which time I will come here and lead it away from you. It will devour your water, and you must make a great effort to bear it." The ocean agreed to this, and the fire entered and was held in check, burning quietly with its halo of flames.¹³⁰

A very similar myth is told about a conflict with Indra instead of Kāma; again the uncontrollable, unreturnable flame from Śiva's eye is placed in the ocean, but this time instead of producing "gentle" (or ambrosial) flames it produces the demon Jalandhara:

Once Indra came with the gods to see Śiva on Kailāsa; Indra saw a naked yogi there and reviled him and struck him with his thunderbolt; but the thunderbolt was reduced to ashes, and the man's neck turned blue where it had struck, for the yogi was Śiva himself. Then Śiva glanced at Indra with the fire of his third eye and was about to kill him; but Bṛhaspati begged him to protect Indra and restrain the fire. Śiva said, "How can I take back the anger that has come forth from my eye? How can a snake put on again the skin that he has sloughed off?" Bṛhaspati asked him to throw the *tejas* somewhere else, and Śiva took it with his hand and threw it into the salt ocean at the confluence of the Ganges. There it took the form of a child, Jalandhara.¹³¹

The Jalandhara story is linked with the submarine mare by two incidental references: Indra, trying to justify to Jalandhara the churning of the ocean (who is considered to be Jalandhara's father), says, "Formerly the ocean was a refuge for my enemy, Mainaka, and also for the fire in the form of a horse that burnt all creatures; therefore we punish him".¹³² This is the only passage in which the ocean is considered to have helped the mare and harmed the universe by harbouring the fire. Elsewhere Jalandhara boasts, "I

¹²⁹ *Matsya Purāṇa*, 154. 250–255; *Skanda Purāṇa*, 1. 2. 24. 42–3.

¹³⁰ *Śiva Purāṇa*, 2. 3. 20. 1–23; *Kālikā Purāṇa*, 44. 124–136; *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa* (Bombay, Gujarat Printing Press, 1913), 22. 108–111; 23. 1–4.

¹³¹ *Śiva Purāṇa*, 2. 5. 13. 1–50; 2. 5. 14. 1–4; *Padma Purāṇa*, 6. 98. 5–19.

¹³² *Padma Purāṇa*, 6. 5. 19–20.

obstructed the mouth of the mare-fire and flooded the whole universe",¹³³ a reference to the necessity of the fire's consuming the ocean water, just as it is necessary for the ocean waters to subdue the mare.

In addition to these two myths, there are scattered references to Śiva as the mare-fire throughout Sanskrit literature. In the *Mahābhārata* it is said, "Śiva's mouth is the mare's head".¹³⁴ The three eyes of Śiva are said to be the sun, moon, and fire, while his tongue is the subterranean mare-fire (whose tongue is fire).¹³⁵ The fire of Śiva's anger, the Aurva fire, and the fire of Kāma combine in a verse spoken by the love-sick King Duṣyanta to Kāma:

Surely the fire of Śiva's anger still burns in you today,
like the fire of Aurva in the ocean;
otherwise, Kāma, how could you be so hot
as to reduce people like me to ashes?¹³⁶

Once again the fire of Śiva's angry asceticism has combined with the fire of desire. Śiva is himself half fire and half water; he is fire and Pārvati is water, and they are one. He is the ascetic fire which rages against the erotic power; and he is the fire of passion that cannot be controlled by asceticism. He is in this the image of the balance of powers in the universe; his flame blazes eternally, unquenched by all the floods of nature, like the flame within the sea.

¹³³ *Saura Purāṇa* (Calcutta, Baṅgabāsi Press, 1816), 37. 22.

¹³⁴ *Mahābhārata*, XIII. 17. 54; cf. Nilakaṇṭha on XIII. 17. 56 (Bombay edition).

¹³⁵ T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu iconography* (2 vols., 4 parts), Madras, Law Printing House, 1916, II, I, 173, citing *Uttarakāraṇāgama*.

¹³⁶ *Abhijñānaśākuntala* of Kālidāsa (12th ed., Bombay, Nirṇaya Sāgara Press, 1958), 3. 2 (alternative verse).



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Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty

SACRED COWS
AND PROFANE
MARES IN INDIAN
MYTHOLOGY

THE INDO-EUROPEAN CORE AND THE IRISH RITUAL

Before the Indo-Aryans reached the Indian subcontinent, they worshiped a goddess in the form of a white mare who was dangerous but beneficent, erotic and fertile, *mysterium fascinans et tremendum*. Traces of her can be found in an Irish ritual in which a king pantomimed copulation with a mare that was subsequently killed and cooked, her broth swallowed by the king. An apparent inversion of this ritual appears in ancient India: a queen pantomimed copulation with a dead stallion to whom she had previously fed rice symbolic of seed.

The striking parallels between the ancient Indian and Irish horse sacrifices have been discussed for fifty years,¹ most recently by Jaan Puhvel,² who has called attention to the significance of the reversal of the sexes in the two rituals—mare and king in Ireland,

This essay was presented as my inaugural lecture in Swift Hall, University of Chicago, on November 6, 1978. Parts of it were taken from my book, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, in press).

¹ See Franz Rolf Schröder, "Ein altirischer Krönungsritus und das indogermanische Rossopfer," *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 16 (1927): 310–12; J. Pokorný, "Das nicht-Indo-germanische Substrat im Irischen," *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 16 (1927): 95–114.

² Jaan Puhvel, "Aspects of Equine Functionality," in *Myth and Law among the Indo-Europeans* (Berkeley, 1970), pp. 159–72.

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stallion and queen in India—a reversal which, he maintains, “provides us with a wedge for penetrating from the ritualistic to the mythological level in dealing with Indo-European equine tradition.” By driving that wedge into some previously overlooked Indian mythological materials, and by seeking to extract from them certain structural and psychological patterns, it may be possible to gain new insights into the meaning of the ancient myth and ritual and to trace its later history in India.

The ancient Indo-European ritual, which may be tentatively reconstructed from the extant Greek, Roman, Norse, Irish, Welsh, Germanic, Gallic, and Indian evidence, began with symbolic copulation between the royal figure and the equine figure (of whatever gender) and ended with the slaughter of the animal and the eating of its flesh or seed. The myth adds certain details to this equine *Liebestod* scenario: A goddess in the form of a white mare assumed human form and mated with an aging sun king. Impregnated by him through her mouth, she gave birth to hippomorphic twins, male and female, who incestuously begat the human race. The goddess or her evil black alter ego injured or threatened to devour her child or the king. She then disappeared. The myth ends here, but the ritual elaborates upon the simple disappearance of the mare and the simultaneous mutilation of the king: in the ritual, the king killed the mare and ate her in order to restore his waning powers.

This text is not a true Indo-European prototype; that is, I do not wish to suggest that there actually was an ancient proto-Indo-European myth that contained every one of the elements I have included in my summary. I am not constructing a monomyth. But the summary does enable us to isolate the mythemes, to distinguish the recurrent elements from those superimposed by a few individual cultural variants, to see patterns. In this sense, it may represent the core of the myth, but it is a thematic rather than a historic core. It may indeed turn out to be the historic core, but I am not prepared to prove this, nor is it relevant to my study of the meaning of the myth in India. Proto-Indo-Europe, the country east of the asterisk, is a never-never land less real to me than the world of the enduring cluster of motifs on which variations are struck, but the prototype is a heuristic intellectual construct.

This “core” myth appears with many variations in different Indo-European texts, but the Irish and Indian are most detailed and best supported by ritual. In the Irish ritual (recorded in 1185 A.D. by Giraldus Cambrensis), a white mare was led before the king

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in the presence of the people; the king approached her like a beast (i.e., from the rear) and “professed his bestiality” (a monkish euphemism for copulation with the mare). The mare was then killed, cut into pieces, and boiled, and the king bathed in the broth, drinking it by lapping it up directly with his mouth, not using a cup, and eating the mare’s flesh.³ This brief text suggests far more than it states, but even here one sees *in nuce* three essential elements: the mating of the king with a white mare; the slaughter of the mare; and the eating of her flesh and drinking of her essential fluids.

Although the Irish text is late, brief, and problematic (having been recorded by a monk who could scarcely believe, let alone understand, what he had seen), it is supported by so much other Indo-European material that it may be taken as an instance of a widespread and perhaps ancient myth. The one element unique to the Irish ritual—the eating of the mare’s flesh—appears elsewhere only in its inverted forms, that is, the eating of the stallion and/or the eating by the mare. These two motifs jointly form a clear structural contrast to the Irish text. But the killing (without eating) of the mare is widespread in myth and ritual; since the stallion, when killed, is often devoured, and since this is generally the fate of sacrificial animals, it seems reasonable to suggest that the eating of the mare was also generally practiced. That the texts do not record this ritual can be explained by the suppression of positive mare myths and rituals in androcentric Indo-European traditions; this hypothesis will be one burden of the rest of this analysis.

THE VEDIC RITUAL AND THE MYTH OF SARANYŪ

In the Indian ritual, a stallion was fed balls of rice said to be symbolic of seed; he was then killed (by suffocation) and symbolically castrated. Finally the chief queen pantomimed copulation with the dead stallion, addressing him obscenely and urging him to copulate with her. This ceremony took place at the end of a year in which the stallion had been kept away from mares; a group of mares was kept penned up near the stallion at the time of the ceremony. The king, who lay in chastity with his favorite consort

³ Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topographia Hibernica*, ed. J. S. Brewer, 8 vols. (London, 1861–91), 5: 169; Sir Richard Colt Hoare, trans., *The Historical Works of Giraldus Cambrensis, Containing the Topography of Ireland . . .* (London, 1905), p. 138.

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during the eve of the ceremony, was to receive the powers of the stallion.⁴

Several inversions of the Irish ritual are apparent here, in addition to the central one (queen replacing king, stallion replacing mare). But since the king and the mare are present, albeit in secondary roles, one begins to see a conflation of two sacred models rather than the simple replacement of one by the other.

The next inversion is similarly qualified: the Irish mare is eaten; the Indian stallion is fed. But this is superimposed upon a pattern in both rituals which requires that the human participants benefit from the ceremony at the expense of the sacrificed equine (divine) partners; and there are *two* human participants in the Vedic rite. Thus the queen is said to become pregnant not by eating the stallion but by feeding him, a symbolic inconsistency in the extant rite. Moreover, the true beneficiary in the Indian ritual is the king, who takes on the powers of the stallion, rather than the queen, whose increased fertility is of merely peripheral importance to the ritual. Thus the king grows strong not by eating the mare but by having the stallion (his alter ego) eat the seed that must, symbolically, be the stallion's own—a substance drained from him during his intercourse with the queen. These overlapping models suggest the possible loss of an intermediary rite in which the stallion (or his seed) was eaten by the queen—or, indeed, by the king. This hypothesis will be supported by the many myths in which the queen does indeed swallow the stallion's seed, as well as by later Hindu rituals in which a woman who wishes to conceive a son eats a ball of rice mixed with milk.

Both of the two basic ritual models (the Irish and the official Indian paradigm) are preserved in the Vedic myth, where they coexist in a tension more blatant than that which we have found in the ritual. Here again we have both king and queen (in the form of the sun god and his wife) as well as both stallion and mare (their theriomorphic forms). However unlike the pairings in the rituals, in which the human participant had an equine partner, the myth depicts stallion with mare, anthropomorphic god with goddess.

Aditi, the mother of the gods, brought forth eight sons. Seven were well-formed, but the eighth miscarried and came forth an unshaped lump, as broad as it was high, the size of a man. The other sons of Aditi became gods;

⁴ For various Vedic texts describing this ritual, see Paul Émile Dumont, *L'Āśvamedha, description du sacrifice solennel du cheval dans le culte védique d'après les textes du Yajurveda blanc* (Paris, 1927). For more texts and further interpretations, see O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, chap. 6.

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but she pushed the eighth away, to propagate and then to die. His brothers, however, shaped him so that he was not lost; they cut the flesh away from him and threw it into a lump, and in this way they fashioned Vivasvant, the sun.

Vivasvant married Saranyū (or Samjñā, "bright image"), the daughter of Tvaṣṭr, the artisan of the gods. But she substituted for herself another, identical female, Chāyā ("dark shadow") and went away, leaving the substitute behind her. Vivasvant begat upon the substitute a son, Manu, the ancestor of the race of men. Thus they concealed the immortal woman from mortals. Saranyū took the form of a mare when she fled, but then Vivasvant took the form of a stallion and followed her. In their haste, the semen fell on the ground, and the mare smelled that semen because she desired to become pregnant. Thus the twin Aśvins were born, and Saranyū abandoned the twins.⁵

This is the story as it is told in the R̥g Veda and the texts immediately following the R̥g Veda. Vivasvant is abandoned first by his mother and then by his wife, who also abandons their twins. His wife has two forms, dark and light—the dark form begets a mortal child, the light form, immortal twins. The psychological motivations and theological implications of these events may be surmised even from these early, often obscure texts, but they become clearer, through hindsight, when analysed in the context of later, far more explicit expansions of the myth—despite the fact that these expansions often introduce new points of view at direct odds with the Vedic viewpoint. Indeed, it is precisely at the point where these manipulations become most blatant that we can begin to discern the problem posed by the earlier texts.

THE HINDU MYTH OF SARANYŪ AND VIVASVANT

Before Saranyū abandoned Vivasvant, she bore him twins, a boy and a girl, named Yama and Yamī; she left him then because she was "unsatisfied with her husband's form." Meanwhile, Chāyā, the shadow wife, mistreated her twin step-children, and the boy, Yama, kicked her, whereupon she cursed him that his foot would fall off. When Yama reported this to his father, Vivasvant realized that Chāyā was not his true wife, as a mother could not harm her child that way; he modified the curse so that Yama did not lose his foot, but became the first mortal, king of the dead in the underworld. Then Vivasvant went to Saranyū's father, Tvaṣṭr, who told him that Saranyū had fled because he blazed too fiercely; Vivasvant asked Tvaṣṭr to place him upon his lathe and trim his form, and this was done. When Vivasvant had been given a handsome body by Saranyū's father in this way, he went to seek his wife. He found her in the form of a mare;

⁵ R̥g Veda with the commentary of Sāyana, 6 vols. (London, 1890–92), 10.17.1–2; 10.72.8–9; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* of the White Yajur Veda, in the *Madhyandina Śākha* (Benares, 1964), 3.1.3–5; Saunaka, *Brhaddevatā*, Harvard Oriental Series, no. 5 (Cambridge, Mass., 1904), 6.162–63, 7.1–6; Yaska, *Nirukta*, ed. Lakshman Sarup (Oxford, 1921), 12.10; see also Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, ed. and trans., *Hindu Myths: A Sourcebook* (Baltimore, 1975), pp. 60–65.

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taking the form of a stallion, he approached her. She turned to face him, to protect her hindquarters, and his seed entered her nose. In this way the twin Aśvins were born. Then Saranyū resumed her own form and went back home with Vivasvant.⁶

How has this version changed the myth? The initial mutilation of Vivasvant because of his mother's dissatisfaction with him is now duplicated, and he is mutilated again, this time because of his wife's dissatisfaction—while his son, Yama, is mutilated as a result of being abandoned by one mother and abused by a second. Now that the mortal twins, Yama and Yamī, are abandoned, the immortal twins, the Aśvins, are not. Finally, a reason is given—at two different points in the myth—to explain why Saranyū deserted her husband, and a new reason is given for the abnormal mode of her impregnation. Where the first text implied that the Aśvins were conceived through the nose because Saranyū *wanted* to become pregnant, in the later variant it is said that she did so to *avoid* becoming pregnant.

These changes suggest ways of interpreting the myth in terms of its development within changing contexts of Indian culture. A few themes are repeated over and over, with variations. In the first version, the ambivalent Indo-European goddess has already been split into several female figures. Indeed, in retrospect we can see the significance of the proliferation of the women in the Indian rite, where the king lay with his favorite consort who remained chaste, but the stallion lay with the official queen who behaved obscenely, reversals of both of their normal roles. In the myth, too, Saranyū has two doubles (her "shadow" and the mare that she becomes) and two natures (the loving mother and the wicked stepmother or rejecting mare-mother). The image of the destructive mare applies to Saranyū in three ways within the second text, though two of the episodes are transferred to other mothers. First, Vivasvant's mother miscarries him and tries to kill him (a danger from which his brothers rescue him by trimming his form); then the "shadow" mother causes Yama's leg to be mutilated (a danger from which his father rescues him by making him fall to the underworld); and finally Saranyū's desertion causes Vivasvant to be trimmed again, this time (significantly) by his wife's father.

The third episode—the trimming of the mature sun—appears only in post-Vedic texts and is clearly a development of the first

⁶ *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (Calcutta, 1862), 77–80, 103–5; *Mahābhārata* (Poona, 1933–69), 1.60; *Harivamśa* (Poona, 1969), 1.9.1; *Matsya Purāṇa*, Anandāśrama Sanskrit Series no. 54 (Poona, 1907), 11; *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (Calcutta, 1972), 3.2; see also O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, pp. 65–70, 318–19.

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episode—the trimming of the embryonic sun. In early versions of the third episode, in which there is still a strong influence by the first, it is said that Saranyū left her husband because he had “no form at all,” or was perfectly round. However, as the myth develops, it is said that the sun had an unbearable brilliance, that he was *too* majestic for her, and so he had to be “trimmed down” (i.e., made round, as he is today) before he could be a suitable companion for his little bride. The shift from a husband unacceptable because of his inferiority to one unacceptable because of his superiority is highly significant in the history of the mare. But whether she is stronger or weaker than her husband, Saranyū injures him; Vivasvant is mutilated by two women, his mother and his wife, and his son, Yama, is mutilated by a third, the step-mother. In all three cases, a father or brother officially minimizes the damage but actually inflicts some physical injury upon him.

The psychological implications of these family dramas, replete with incest and mutilation, are readily apparent without the need for sophisticated psychoanalytic devices, and they are, I think, highly relevant to a full understanding of the myth.⁷ However, the present analysis will focus instead upon certain structural patterns that suggest important theological developments.

IMMORTAL WOMAN AND MORTAL MAN; MORTAL WOMAN AND IMMORTAL MAN

The two patterns of the myth of Saranyū are based upon contrasting perceptions of the power balance between the two main participants: Saranyū is more powerful or less powerful than her husband. This in turn is a reflection of the conflation of two contrasting ritual images: Saranyū is the divine mare with a human consort (the Irish ritual), or she is the human queen with a divine stallion as her consort (the Vedic ritual). The two levels of the myth may be chronologically discrete (the mare goddess of the ancient Indo-European world preceding the stallion god of Vedic India) though this is difficult to prove. In any case, the two patterns appear to be fully integrated in the transmitted versions that we have. But by sorting them out and separating them, we can see the process of their interaction.

In the myth of Saranyū in the *R̥g Veda*, the sun (whom we would normally regard as an immortal, and who is definitely a god in the *Vedas*) is a mortal. This is emphasized by the story of his birth, for

⁷ See O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, chaps. 2, 4, 6.

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he fails to reach the gods and is “born to die.”⁸ Saranyū, however, is immortal. This immortality, and its role in causing Saranyū to leave Vivasvant, is one of the very few things that we learn about her in the cryptic Ṛg Vedic verse that is the earliest source of her story—“They concealed the immortal woman from mortals.”⁹ In the Ṛg Veda, the gods conceal her from her husband (as they conceal Urvasī, the swan maiden, from her husband, king Purūras¹⁰); in the Purāṇas, Saranyū flees of her own will but for the same reason. As Bloomfield remarked long ago:

Saranyū presents Vivasvant with the twins Yama and Yamī, but after this the feeling that she is the victim of a mésalliance gains ground more and more. The poet at *Harivaṃśa* 547 has a true sense of the situation when he says: . . . “Saranyū, endowed with beauty and youth, took no delight in the form of her husband.” Possibly the story aims to convey a more special form of Saranyū’s dissatisfaction, which peeps out not only in her abandonment of her husband, but more clearly in her *metamorphosis into a mare*: Vivasvant in his human capacity may have failed to satisfy the instincts of the goddess, which were probably laid out on too large a scale for his mortal capacities. . . .¹¹

Bloomfield states the case with nineteenth-century delicacy but with unmistakable insight: the metamorphosis into a mare reveals the woman’s “large scale instincts.” These instincts drive her to leave Vivasvant in the early Vedic variant; but as her status drops in the post-Vedic period, they cause her to flee from him because he is “too brilliant” and to have him “cut down to size” by her father (instead of by his mother, as in the earlier text).

The fact that the Saranyū myth is a hierogamy between a mortal and an immortal thus accounts both for Saranyū’s desertion of her husband and for her “trimming” of him. Either the sun is impotent and abandoned by the goddess or, later, he is *too* powerful and therefore castrated by the mortal woman, a no-win situation if ever there was one. In the first text, she abandons him before she has children and returns to him in order to become pregnant. In the second, she abandons him after she has children and flees from him in order to avoid becoming pregnant again. In the first text,

⁸ Ṛg Veda, 10.72.8–9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.17.2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.95.9; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 11.5.1.2–4. In the latter texts, the Gandharvas abduct Urvasī back to heaven by *revealing him* to her, in violation of their contract. This is one of several inversions of the usual pattern of immortal woman and mortal man (where *she* must not be seen by *him*).

¹¹ Maurice Bloomfield, “Contributions to the Interpretation of the Veda,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 15 (1893): 172–88, esp. p. 178 (emphasis added).

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she is a figure of fertility, the goddess who unites with the king in order to produce immortal progeny; in the second text, she is an erotic figure who rejects her mortal progeny. This transition from good mother to evil mother is highly significant in the Indian context. Indeed, still later texts tried to restore a modicum of maternal spirit to Saranyū by stating that she turned away from the stallion because she feared that he might not be her husband.¹² This gloss makes good sense in the light of emerging concepts of caste marriage but is untrue to the original spirit of the myth.

THE GOOD AND EVIL GODDESS

Thus on the human level the ambivalence of the goddess is expressed by the contrast between the good mother and the evil mother. On the divine level, the positive theology of ingesting the goddess or having fructifying contact with her (the Irish ritual) comes to interact with the negative theology of being eaten by the goddess or being sexually drained by contact with her (the Vedic myth). At first the mare is mutilated, chopped up in the cauldron; the immortal mare dies so that the mortal king may live. The ultimate power transferred from her to him is the power of immortality and rebirth. But then the Vedic stallion is castrated; the mantle of immortality passes from a male divinity to a human king. The mare has only a vestigial role, and the human queen acts as a mediary between human and divine male figures. Thus there are two basic patterns of variation on each of the many levels of the myth: equine/human, immortal/mortal, male/female, killed/killing, eaten/eating (see appendix).

In the Irish ritual, good power flows from above, from the mare to the king. In the Indian myth, evil power flows from above, from the mare to the sun king, or power is drained up from the mortal—flowing in the “perverse” direction. This is symbolized by the flow of fluids—the mare’s essence ingested by the Irish king, the sun-stallion’s essence ingested by the Indian mare (with the Vedic stallion as an intermediary case—fed by the queen but fed his own substance and not hers). One may conjecture that the positive pattern (good power flowing from above) is earlier and the negative pattern (evil power from above) later. In any case, however, both models come to exist side by side at a very early period and reveal a theology that must be confronted as an integrated problem: the

¹² *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, 103–5.

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goddess who can destroy or bless, the ambivalent goddess whose presence is always desired even when her essence may be death.

The simultaneous existence of the paradigms of mortal man/immortal woman (mare) and mortal woman/immortal man (stallion) produces complex moral conflicts in the mare mythology. The myth of the mare and the king (which also comes to appear as the swan maiden and the prince) confronts the myth of the stallion and the queen, Leda and the swan. There is a tantalizing appearance of historical chronology in the myth of the mare if one separates these strands. At first there is one mare-goddess, an awesome and dangerous creature, sacred in Otto's sense of the word, a source of power who invigorates the aging king and dies in a sacrifice of her immortality to his mortality. At this period, the mare is still whole, integrated. But under the influence of increasing Indo-European androcentrism (Dare one say male chauvinism? One dare.), the mare goddess was split into two parts, the good and evil mother. Here we begin to have proliferations of women in the rituals and the myths. Now it is feared that the mare will take away the powers of her lover, and so the auspicious (albeit dangerous) white mare must be given a malevolent black alter ego who threatens to kill or mutilate the king. Also at this time, the image of the mare was overlaid by another already available Indo-European image of the goddess who mates with a mortal—the swan maiden, a far more delicate and “feminine” image, frail, in need of protection—though still morally ambivalent: the good, chaste Odette and the evil (erotic) Odile. Finally, the goddess was demoted to ignominious mortality and passivity as the model of mortal woman and immortal man rose above the model of immortal woman and mortal man. Now the helpless female was left hoping against hope that the great horse/swan god would deign to visit her (riding on *his* white horse). Now Leda awaits Zeus, awaits the moment when she might, in Yeats's words, “put on his knowledge with his power/Before the indifferent beak could let her drop.”

THE SACRED COW IN VEDIC AND HINDU MYTHOLOGY

The demise in the status of the mare was accompanied by an equivalent rise in that of the cow. The cow was already a powerful symbolic figure during the heyday of the mare (just as the stallion was); it is a matter of reemphasis and revalidation of existing sacred models rather than the usurpation of an old model by a new one. In the R̥g Veda, as in all ancient Indo-European cultures,

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cattle are of great ritual value.¹³ The magic wishing-cow, who appears in Ireland as well as in India,¹⁴ is the earth milked of good and evil substances by gods and demons.¹⁵ She is churned out of the ocean of milk, and in turn the ocean of milk, from which all else is churned forth, flows from the udder of the wishing-cow.¹⁶ In Vedic India, stallions are far more sacred than mares, and cows are more sacred than bulls; equines are properly male, the female being "unfemale"; bovines are properly female. Horses are, as a species, revered for masculine, aggressive qualities, which accounts for the preference for stallions over mares. Cattle, on the other hand, are passive and play a receptive, creative role.

The seed of the stallion is the counterpart of the milk of the cow; the phallus of the stallion is the counterpart of the udder; the *Ṛg Veda* abounds in metaphors that play upon this equivalence.¹⁷ The creative fluids that flow from the cow and the stallion are each androgynously, unilaterally capable of giving life. When the ocean of milk is churned, the two sacred animals that emerge are the magic wishing-cow and the sun stallion, *Ucchaiśravas*.¹⁸ The *Ṛg Veda* thus presents two positive theriomorphic images (cow and stallion) and faintly adumbrates the third image, the already negative mare descended from the ambivalent Indo-European mare goddess.

But several elements of the cluster of Vedic symbolic and ritual patterns become dramatically altered within 1,000 years. In the Hindu period, cattle have become preeminent over equines, and mares are now regarded as dangerous and demonic.

The reasons for this may be seen in the change in the attitude to women from the Vedic to the Hindu period. The Vedic poet made no distinction between erotic and fertile women, though women were in general relegated to the background of Vedic life and goddesses are of minor importance in the *Ṛg Veda*. In both sub-Vedic (i.e., village) and pre-Vedic (i.e., Indus Valley) India, there

¹³ See Bruce Lincoln, "The Indo-European Cattle-raiding Myth," *History of Religions* 16, no. 1 (August 1976): 42-65, and "Socioeconomics and Religious World View: Cattle in Indo-European Religion" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, San Francisco, December 29, 1977).

¹⁴ Wilhelm Koppers, "Pferdeopfer und Pferdekult der Indogermanen," *Wiener Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte und Linguistik* 4 (1936): 279-411, esp. 320, 326-27.

¹⁵ *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 5.3.5.4-7; Śāyana's commentary on the *Atharva Veda* (Bombay, 1895), 8.10.22-29; see also Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley, 1976), pp. 321-31.

¹⁶ *Mahābhārata*, 1.23.50; Vālmiki, *Rāmāyaṇa* (Baroda, 1958-75), 7.23.21.

¹⁷ For numerous examples, see O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, chap. 2.

¹⁸ *Mahābhārata*, 1.15.17; O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, pp. 273-80.

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is no evidence of a separation between the roles of woman as erotic object and woman as mother—the cheerful Yakṣiṇīs and callipygian Indus figurines are well fitted for both tasks. These cultures present non-Indo-European parallels to the Indo-European mare-goddess in terms of integration, though not in their theriomorphic symbolism, for there are no mares at Mohenjo-Daro.

But from the period of the Upaniṣads and Buddhism (ca. 700 B.C.), the cult of asceticism reared its ugly head. Lust came to be regarded as the work of the devil, woman as the servant of the devil and the most dangerous enemy of the ascetic. Even in the R̥g Veda, one encounters the myth of the dangerous seductress who sucks the man dry.¹⁹ By the late Vedic period, the myth of the king who devours the mare was replaced by the myth of the mare who devours the man. The Vedic image of the fertile cow that gives milk is retained and now contrasted with the image of the erotic mare who steals the equivalent of milk—the stallion's seed. The cow feeds her child; the mare eats her son (and her husband—who are, in many cases, one and the same helpless male). The cow that symbolizes the breast from which all good things flow is contrasted with the bad cow, the bad breast that feeds itself,²⁰ the mare that drinks the fluids.

Ironically, this basically female image (the self-nourishing breast) is applied in India more often to the male (the yogi who keeps his own seed within his body) than to the female (the bad mother), and with polarized moral values: it is good for a man to hold in his fluids (to keep the woman from getting them) but bad for a woman to do so (to keep her child from getting them). The Vedic stallion who sprinkles his seed upon the earth to fertilize it has now been changed into the stallion whose forces are bottled up inside him, curbed and bitted to generate power like a Ferrari revving up its motor in neutral. In this context it is instructive to look back upon the strangely involuted horse sacrifice—recorded several hundred years after the R̥g Veda—in which the stallion is fed seed—combining the functions of the ancient Vedic stallion or Indo-European mare (to give seed) and the Vedic or Hindu mare (to eat seed). The stallion of the horse sacrifice behaves like a yogi: he contains his seed within himself, and is, like a yogi, under a firm vow of chastity, even (or, rather, especially) in the presence of the mares at the sacrifice.

¹⁹ R̥g Veda, 1.179.4.

²⁰ Melanie Klein, *Contributions to Psychoanalysis 1921–1945* (London, 1948), pp. 357–65; O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, pp. 355–57.

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THE INSATIABLE MARE-FIRE BENEATH THE SEA

These negative connotations of feminine sexuality, contrasting with the new ideal of the cow, were then applied to mares. The Vedic symbolism of the fiery stallion tamed under water,²¹ a positive image reinforced by the Upaniṣadic concept of the harnessing of the senses (which are likened to wild horses),²² was given demonic overtones and a change of sex. The result was the myth of the mare-fire beneath the sea, lurking until the time of its release at doomsday, smoldering under hair-trigger balance with the floods of the ocean, constantly straining at the bit to burst forth and destroy us all. This is the fire with the head of a mare.²³ The fire of the mare's mouth drinks the waters of the ocean and lets them out again; eventually this fire of the underworld will destroy the universe, at the end of the age. The fire is in her mouth because the mare is the great devourer.

The mare fire is associated with the demon powers that lurk in the underworld that is its home; it is also associated with death, sometimes said to be the wife of Death.²⁴ It is frequently used as a metaphor for a voracious or insatiable energy: "Not by anything can the fire of hatred be assuaged; it is inextinguishable, like the submarine fire."²⁵ The mare beneath the sea is considered to be a particularly apt metaphor for the insatiable appetites of a promiscuous woman,²⁶ and the elements that make up the image (fire, water, death) combine in the descriptions of evil women: "Fire is never satisfied with fuel, the ocean is never filled by the rivers, death is never satisfied by living beings and women are never satisfied with men."²⁷ In noting the popularity of this proverb, one psychiatrist remarked on "a secret conviction among many Hindu men that the feminine principle is really the opposite [of the chaste ideal—the cow]—treacherous, lustful and rampant with an insatiable, contaminating sexuality."²⁸

When the gods and demons churn the ocean to obtain the elixir of immortality, a poison emerges and threatens to devour the gods

²¹ *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* (Leiden, 1919), 1.2.8.

²² *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 3.4–6.

²³ See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, "The Submarine Mare in the Mythology of Śiva," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1 (1971): 9–27.

²⁴ *Brahma Purāṇa* (Calcutta, 1954), 116.22–25.

²⁵ *Mahābhārata*, 12.137.41.

²⁶ *Śiva Purāṇa* (Benares, 1964), 5.24.29; *Mahābhārata*, 13.38.25–29.

²⁷ *Śiva Purāṇa*, 5.24.29–34.

²⁸ Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World: A Psychoanalytic Study of Childhood and Society in India* (Delhi, 1978), p. 93.

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until Śiva, the great yogi and drinker of poison, swallows it.²⁹ The poison is merely another aspect of the destructive fire waiting to come forth from the sea, a devouring poison that can only be destroyed by being devoured in its turn by the god who holds in all fluids. In another myth, a demon named Raktabīja [Blood-Seed] (because every drop of his blood turns into the seed from which another demon is instantly born) threatens the world until the goddess creates another goddess to drink up the inexhaustible flood. The goddess commands this fury, "Open your mouth and drink his blood as if your mouth were the fire of the mare."³⁰ Since the demon's blood is seed, the goddess is behaving like the man-eating, castrating mare; since the seed is an unending flood, she becomes the insatiable fire in the ocean.

There are many myths about the origin of the mare-fire, most of them involving a woman who violates her vow of chastity and becomes pregnant in an abnormal manner.³¹ Another cycle of myths attributes the birth of the mare to the violated vow of chastity of a yogi—the greatest of all yogis, Śiva himself. In this myth, Śiva is seduced from his meditation by the combined efforts of Pārvatī (an aspect of the erotic goddess) and the god of desire incarnate, Kāma. At the moment of the seduction, Śiva opened the third eye in the middle of his forehead and burnt Kāma to ashes; but the fire of Śiva's anger combined with the fire of Kāma and began to burn the universe. To protect the gods, Brahmā gave the fire the form of a mare with ambrosial flames coming out of her mouth. He led her to the ocean and begged him to keep her within the waters, letting her devour the ocean waters until doomsday. The ocean agreed to this.³² The fire that Brahmā made into the mare is the fire of suppressed passion and anger. It is the destructive force of rigid chastity breaking out in lust and hatred, here (and elsewhere) attributed to a yogi but more often attributed to a woman controlled against her will.³³

The Indo-European mare was dangerous because her erotic powers were untamed, the overpowering forces of a goddess. For

²⁹ *Mahābhārata*, 1.15–17.

³⁰ *Vāmana Purāṇa* (Benares, 1968), 30.27.

³¹ See O'Flaherty, "The Submarine Mare in the Mythology of Śiva," and *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, chap. 7.

³² *Śiva Purāṇa*, 2.3.20.1–23; *Kālikā Purāṇa* (Bombay, 1891), 44.124–36; *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa* (Bombay, 1913), chaps. 22–23.

³³ See Richard Lee Brubaker, "Lustful Woman, Chaste Wife, Ambivalent Goddess: A South Indian Myth," *Anima* 3 (Spring 1977): 59–62; "The Ambivalent Mistress: A Study of South Indian Village Goddesses and Their Religious Meaning," (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, Divinity School, 1978).

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this very reason, however, the mare was also able to bless and make fruitful—not merely because she was both mother and whore, both cow and mare, but because her powers flowed freely down to her mortal consort. The submarine mare, by contrast, is a symbol of thwarted power, human or divine; it is the image of resentful, unwilling chastity imposed on the female by terrified males; it is passion denied and suppressed, divinity denied and devalued. The yogi is a positive image of powers held in and controlled (though the myth of Śiva and Kāma indicates hidden reefs even in those quiet waters); the woman who holds back her milk is the image of the evil goddess. The myth of the mare implies that a man may voluntarily hold in his powers, while a woman will do so only under compulsion. Yoginīs, who do undergo voluntary self-control, are quickly assimilated to the herd of mares; they are the servants of the ambivalent Kālī, dangerous and highly erotic females.³⁴ In the Hindu view, a woman's suppressed or repulsed eroticism is as volatile and explosive as nitroglycerine. We say that hell hath no fury to match this, and the Hindus say that this *is* the Fury that breaks out of hell at doomsday.

Thus erotic, nonfertile energy—mare power—came to be contrasted with nonerotic, fertile energy—cow power or yogi power. The mare is lascivious and destructive, while the stallion (or the yogi) and the cow are (primarily, though not without exceptions) fertile and creative. The fact that only the male horse is ritually acceptable is evident from a myth that horses used to have breasts until Śiva cut them off.³⁵ Horses should not have breasts; cows should have breasts. The horse-headed female Yakṣa (Yakṣiṇī) was once a positive symbol of combined eroticism and fertility; as the mare falls into disrepute, so these folk figures take on a darker aspect. The Yakṣiṇī with the head of a mare is depicted in Buddhist sculptures carrying off terrified men to a fate worse than death,³⁶ and Buddhist literature warns about them: a horse-headed Yakṣiṇī was in the habit of eating the men that she captured, until she fell in love with one whom she forced to marry her.³⁷ Another Buddhist Yakṣiṇī, a beautiful mare named Vaḷavāmukhī (“mare head” or “mare mouth,” the same term used for the underwater doomsday fire), was pursued by a king; she

³⁴ See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva* (Oxford, 1973), motif 27ea: erotic Yoginī.

³⁵ *Mahābhārata* 8.24, appendix 1, no. 4, lines 15–21; *Matsya Purāṇa*, 138.40–42.

³⁶ Philip Rawson, *Erotic Art of the East* (New York, 1968), pl. 42; Stella Kramrisch, *The Art of India* (London, 1955), pl. 14.

³⁷ *Padakūśalamāṇava Jātaka*, no. 432.

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plunged into a pond, but he grasped her mane, subdued her, and rode her into battle.³⁸ The first mare is curbed by being persuaded to substitute sexual passion for a more direct form of devouring, but she remains the aggressor, attacking her lover. The second mare plays a more positive role (going back into the water instead of emerging from it like the doomsday mare): she is pursued, captured, subdued, and used aggressively by the king; in this she is more like the ancient Indo-European mare. Indeed, Buddhist sculptures depict men happily mounted upon creatures with the heads of women and the bodies of mares.³⁹

These oppositions in semiequine Buddhist females may be seen as survivals of the two different models of ancient mare myths, one positive and one negative. They may also demonstrate a shift in attitude as a result of the emphasis or de-emphasis on the mare component by changing the distribution of head and body. The head of the creature carried its primary symbolic meaning in the ancient sacrifice and in later myths of horse-headed gods. Thus a creature with the head of a mare and the body of a woman is more mare than woman, while one with the reverse pattern is more woman than mare. The mare-headed figure actively attacks and carries off men, while the mare-bodied figure is pursued (running swiftly with her equine body, designed for flight rather than for attack) and is passively ridden by men. The mare-head overpowers; the mare-body is conquered. Significantly, the creature with the body of the mare usually has not only the head of a woman but the top torso and therefore the breasts of a woman—the element that makes her “safe,” cowlike.

THE MARE WHO EATS AND THE COW WHO FEEDS

The qualities feared in the mare are the mirror image of the qualities revered in the cow. As the mare is transformed from a deity who is eaten—the eucharistic goddess—to the demon who eats, so too the cow is transformed from the sacrificial animal who is eaten (for in the Vedas, cows were the *pièce de résistance* at the meals of gods as well as humans) into an animal who is not eaten.⁴⁰ In the pattern of the mare, the alternative to being eaten is eating—which is what demons do; in the pattern of the cow, the

³⁸ *Mahāvamsa*, 10.53–62.

³⁹ Maurizio Taddei, *The Ancient Civilization of India* (London, 1970), pls. 37 and 155, from the 2d century B.C. and the 5th century A.D., respectively.

⁴⁰ Ludwig Alsdorf, *Beiträge zur Geschichte von Vegetarismus und Rinderverehrung in Indien* (Wiesbaden, 1962).

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alternative to being eaten is a combination of feeding without being eaten (by giving milk) and not being eaten. This option is not available to the mare, and one can only speculate why. Apparently the ancient Indians did not drink mare's milk as so many other Indo-Europeans did. Perhaps the fact that the mare came to be defined as nonmaternal precluded the use of her milk; perhaps she could never be regarded as the source of any fluid other than her own seed, the equivalent of the seed of the stallion who replaced her so early in the Vedic rite. As to the reasons for the cow's transition from an animal sacred and therefore to be eaten to an animal sacred and therefore not to be eaten, many factors are clearly at play—social, economic, historical. However, among them must surely be the revulsion against the once devoured and now devouring mare, the corresponding sanctification of the nurturing cow mother and the mythology of milk as preeminent over the mythology of blood and seed.

The cow is not an unequivocally benevolent figure, but her negative aspect is a result of her failure to fulfill her role rather than a negative quality inherent in that role. Even in the Vedas, the earth-cow is both black and white; she yields good milk and bad milk.⁴¹ In later Hindu mythology, the earth-cow on one occasion holds back her nourishment until she is physically attacked and made to yield her food. She must be forced to change from the evil mother (holding back her fluids) to the good cow from whom all things flow—milk that she explicitly calls her seed.⁴² When the ogress Pūtanā offers the infant Kṛṣṇa her breast that is smeared with poison instead of milk, she means to kill him; Kṛṣṇa, however, sucks out her blood and her life's breath with the milk and kills her instead. Pūtanā then goes to heaven, for by offering Kṛṣṇa her breast—even in a spirit of hatred—she has performed the supreme act of maternal devotion.⁴³ Thus even bad mothers are good in Hinduism; the only bad women are nonmothers. Similarly, even bad cows (and there are myths of destructive cows) are good: a cow whose calf had been beaten by a Brahmin vowed to avenge him and assuage her own sorrow; she kicked the Brahmin's son to death and immediately turned from white to black as evidence of her sin, but she then regained her white color and her purity after bathing in the sacred river Ganges⁴⁴ (the river that is the Milky

⁴¹ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 5.3.4–7; *Atharva Veda*, 8.10.22–29.

⁴² *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 1.13.80.

⁴³ *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Bombay, 1932), 10.6.1–44.

⁴⁴ *Śiva Purāṇa*, 4.6.1–65.

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Way in heaven, another Hindu symbol of the milky goddess—and a galaxy that, significantly, the atavistically horsey Irish call the mare's tail).⁴⁵ The cow cannot remain evil. She is immediately purified, for she *is* purity; she is nonerotic fertility. Thus the ancient goddess has been split into two—the cow, symbolizing woman as the fertile nourishing mother, and the mare, symbolizing woman as the erotic devouring whore.

THE TANTRIC MARE

The mare is no longer worshiped, but she remains a powerful religious symbol. The cow, by contrast, is now enshrined as the quintessential sacred animal. Nevertheless, the cow is not divine; she is not a goddess in Hindu India. Quite the contrary, she is the image of the mortal woman with the immortal man, for she is the very model of the Hindu wife who regards her husband as a god (as the Hindu law books remind us *ad nauseam*). Though it has become a cliché to say that Indians “worship” cows and “worship” their mothers, this is true only in the most debased and fatuous sense of the word. Most Indians do not actually dedicate temples to cows or (heaven forbid) sacrifice goats to cows.

They do, however, worship and offer blood sacrifice to a mother—but she is hardly the cow mother. She is the mare mother. The mare has returned in spirit though not in hippomorphic form. She has returned as the Tantric goddess whose presence is invoked by her human male worshiper, whom she invigorates with her substance through ritual intercourse in the Tantric ceremony. It is expressly stated that the fluids of the female flow to the male in this ceremony as the powers of the goddess flow down to her male devotee who visualizes himself as her divine consort.⁴⁶ Her power flows to him as the cow's milk flows to her son—and as the ancient mare's broth flowed into the Irish king.

For by reversing the flow of the fluids (reinvoking the ancient image of the flow of seed from woman to man), Tantrism reverses the flow of power. The erotic goddess is a source of power while the fertile woman is a danger expressly shunned by the Tantric philosophy that elevates nonmarital, nonfertile love (*parakīyā*) above conventional married love (*svākīyā*).⁴⁷ The goddess is immortal and gives immortality; she is the erotic woman whose

⁴⁵ Personal communication from John Leavitt.

⁴⁶ See O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, chaps. 2, 4, 6.

⁴⁷ See Edward Cameron Dimock, Jr., *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaiṣṇava Sāhajīyā Cult of Bengal* (Chicago, 1966).

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power flows down to the man. But the wife is mortal and deadly; she is the fertile woman who drains away his fluids. In this world view, mares are a source of power and cows a source of loss of power, though these ideas are not expressed theriomorphically. Normal life is living death; ritual life, by inverting normal sexual processes, procures immortality.⁴⁸ The goddess bestows her immortality on her mortal consort by uniting with him in the ritual.

This Tantric image, which has roots in the ancient Vedic ceremony of the chaste student and the prostitute,⁴⁹ filters back into non-Tantric Hinduism, where it confronts the image of the dangerous mare and the safe cow. The result is the revalidation of the ancient ambivalence characteristic of the full goddess and not merely a one-dimensional inversion of an equally one-dimensional Hindu model. For in the local and regional cults of the goddess in India, the image is fully integrated.

REBIRTH FROM THE DEVOURING GODDESS

Under a combination of influences—the resurgence of local non-Aryan (perhaps even pre-Aryan) cults of the goddess and more widespread regional cults of ambivalent figures like Śitalā and Manashā,⁵⁰ as well as the pervading contribution of Tantrism to non-Tantric Hinduism, a new goddess has emerged in Hinduism—or perhaps not such a new goddess. For when the goddess is regarded as a positive figure, a source of power, she ceases to devour and begins to feed—but without turning into a mere cow. This is the positive eucharistic model: to dismember and eat the mare is to absorb the deity's power. Indeed, as myths such as that enacted in the *Bacchae* of Euripides tell us, the refusal to devour the god is the direct cause of being devoured by the god. Eat or ye shall be eaten, the myths cry out.

The threat of being devoured by the goddess is tempered, however, by the force of another compelling line of mythology and

⁴⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (New York, 1958).

⁴⁹ For the Mahāvratā ritual, see Eliade, *Yoga*, p. 257.

⁵⁰ For Śitalā, see Ralph W. Nicholas and Aditi Nath Sarkar, *The Fever Demon and the Census Commissioner: Śitalā Mythology in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Bengal*, South Asia Series (Michigan State University, in press), and Edward C. Dimock, Jr., *A Theology of the Repulsive: Some Reflections on the Śitalā and other Māṅgals*, South Asia Series (Michigan State University, in press); for Manashā, see Edward C. Dimock, Jr., "The Goddess of Snakes in Medieval Bengali Literature," *History of Religions* 1 (Winter 1962): 307–21, and E. C. Dimock, Jr., and A. K. Ramanujan, "The Goddess of Snakes in Medieval Bengali Literature," Part II, *History of Religions* 3, no. 2 (Winter 1964): 300–322.

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theology, in India and elsewhere, that suggests that the way to obtain immortality is not (or not only) by devouring the deity but by allowing oneself to be devoured by the deity.

This concept, foreshadowed in the Vedas, emerges clearly in the Brāhmaṇas. There it is said that the god Indra obtained Soma, the elixir of immortality, by being devoured by the demon Śuṣṇa, who kept the elixir in his mouth. The demon swallows the god and brings him back to life, thus rendering him immortal (as does the elixir).⁵¹ This pattern is replicated in three Epic and Purāṇic myths revolving around Śukra, the priest of the demons. These myths function as three episodes of a single myth.

1. Śukra had the power of reviving demons who fell in the battle between gods and demons. To prevent him from using this power, Śiva swallowed Śukra, but when praised by Śukra, Śiva released him after giving him an epiphany of the universe within his belly. As he emitted Śukra through his penis, henceforth Śukra was called Śukra, "semen." As he emerged, Śiva still wished to harm him, but Devī, the goddess, interceded, pointing out that as he had come out of Śiva's phallus, Śukra was now not only an immortal but her son. Śiva then let Śukra go.⁵²

2. Śukra continued to use his mantra of immortality to revive all the demons who fell during the battle. Śiva, knowing that Śukra could not be killed (perhaps because he, Śiva, had once swallowed him), created a horrible woman with a mouth like a great cavern, with teeth and eyes in her vagina. At Śiva's command, she grabbed Śukra and stripped him and embraced him, and she kept him inside her until the battle was over.⁵³

3. The gods sent Kaca, the son of the priest of the gods, to obtain the secret of immortality from Śukra. Śukra swallowed Kaca unknowingly—the other demons had killed Kaca, pulverized him, and mixed him in wine which they fed to Śukra. When he found out what had happened, Śukra emitted Kaca again at the intercession of his daughter, who was in love with Kaca, and taught him the mantra of immortality. Kaca refused to marry Śukra's daughter, however, arguing that by dwelling in Śukra's belly he had become the son of Śukra and could hardly marry Śukra's daughter, his own sister.⁵⁴

⁵¹ *Kāthaka Samhitā* (Leipzig, 1900), 37.14; O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, p. 281; see Sadashiv A. Dange, *Legends in the Mahābhārata* (New Delhi, 1969), pp. 157–237.

⁵² *Mahābhārata*, 12.278.1–38; O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, pp. 104–27.

⁵³ *Padma Purāṇa* (Poona, 1893), 6.18.82–90.

⁵⁴ *Mahābhārata*, 1.71–72; O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, pp. 281–89.

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In all of these episodes, the act of devouring is performed in aggression, but the person who is devoured becomes immortal. He is reborn as the child of the gods, the son of the terrible mother. These myths may be seen as symbols of initiation and of the rebirth implicit in violent, death-mimicking initiation. Although a god or demon or demoness (it matters little which) is usually the devourer, in each case it is a goddess who intercedes and procures the immortality for the initiate. In the second instance, though the swallower is a textbook case of the image of *vagina dentata*, she nevertheless prevents Śukra from being injured. In effect, she brings him back to life out of her womb after the battle. So too, though the daughter of Śukra behaves like a mare, subjecting Kaca to an incestuous sexual assault,⁵⁵ she saves his life—and is then denied by him, as the mare so often is. Elsewhere it is said that when Śukra and Śiva were in competition, each invoked the same goddess—but she gave Śukra the secret mantra of immortality.⁵⁶ The classical competition between son and father here has a happy ending: the devouring mother blesses her son.

It would appear, therefore, that the Hindus retained a memory of a myth in which being devoured by the mare goddess was a source of religious rebirth. Although in androcentric texts it was a male god—a stallion (for both Śiva and Śukra are powerful yogis)—who was said to do the swallowing, it was still a goddess who made the initiate immortal, a goddess who reappears in one variant of the myth as the actual devourer. Indeed, whereas in the pejorative mare myths the evil goddess simply devours her son, in these texts—perhaps under Tantric, devotional, and Śāktic influence—the devotee becomes her son after she devours him and, as Kaca points out, thus becomes safe from her sexual assaults. When a male god swallows the devotee, he imitates the goddess by becoming pregnant with the child growing in his belly, before he reverts to male status and emits him through the phallus like seed. This “seed,” however, is swallowed by the god in imitation of the mare and is thus a feminine rather than a masculine form of procreation. In this context, the many Hindu myths of male pregnancy⁵⁷ may be seen as instances in which a god, in

⁵⁵ For the theme of incest in the mythology of the mare, see O’Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, chaps. 4, 6.

⁵⁶ *Skanda Purāṇa* (Bombay, 1867), 6.1.149.

⁵⁷ Cf. the male pregnancies of Tvaṣṭṛ (*Atharva Veda*, 9.4.1 and 9.4.3–6); Prajāpati (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 2.2.4.1–8); Yuvanāśva (*Mahābhārata*, 3.126.1–26); Agni and the gods (*Saura Purāṇa* [Calcutta, 1816] 62.5–12); see also O’Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, pp. 343–45.

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imitation of a goddess, gives rebirth to the initiate by swallowing and disgorging him.

The link between swallowing semen and swallowing Soma is implicit in the Vedic myths of Indra and becomes explicit in the myths of Śukra, who is actually called "semen" as a result of being swallowed. This concept reemerges in Tantrism, where the seed is called *amṛta*, the elixir of immortality. One particular Tantric ritual development holds interesting implications for the development of new attitudes to the devoured and devouring goddess. Tantrism retains the ancient yogic concept of the man's need to retain his semen while adding to it the (even more ancient) concept of his rejuvenation through consuming the woman's seed.⁵⁸

Some Tantric texts apparently allow the man to emit his seed but only in order to draw it back again into his body. One text even seems to specify that he should emit it into the mouth of the woman, but again it is eventually restored to him: the semen is passed back and forth from the mouth of the woman to the mouth of the man and is finally placed in a consecrated vessel, whence it is eaten.⁵⁹ One Tibetan Tantric text offers several variations on this theme. At first, the male adept emits from his mouth a stream of sacred syllables; then he visualizes the goddess before him, "the diamond demoness"; he then visualizes himself as the god and the mother on his lap. The white vajra (phallus) of the father unites with the red lotus (vagina) of the mother. The deities then enter into union in the sky and enter the male adept through his mouth or between his eyebrows. They descend, pass through his vajra, and fall and mix into the lotus of the mother. Then the mantra goes "upward from mouth to mouth" (i.e., from the woman's mouth back to the man's). This is regarded as the forward recitation of the mantra. "If the direction is reversed, upward through the diamond path and into the mouth of the goddess, this is the fierce recitation; & I practice each of these in turn." This reversed direction has the seed-mantra travelling up the spine, out of the

⁵⁸ For the antiquity of the concept of the seed of the woman, see Rg Veda, 1.105.2, 1.159.2, 1.160.2, 6.70.1; *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, 6.4.20.

⁵⁹ Abhinavagupta, *Tantrāloka*, chap. 29, stanzas 127–28, pp. 88, 89, and 92, cited by J. L. Masson and M. V. Patwardhan, *Sāntarasa and Abhinavagupta's Philosophy of Aesthetics* (Poona, 1969), p. 42, n. 1; cited also by G. Tucci, "Oriental Notes: III. A Peculiar Image from Gandhāra," *East and West* 18, nos. 3–4 (September–December 1968): 289–92, esp. p. 292; and discussed by Mircea Eliade, "Spirit, Light, and Seed," *History of Religions* 11, no. 1 (August 1971): 1–30, reprinted in *Occultism, Witchcraft, and Cultural Fashions* (Chicago, 1976), pp. 93–110.

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mouth of the man into the mouth of the woman, down into her womb and into his vajra, up through his spine, and so forth as the cycle continues and is continually reversed.⁶⁰

Several images from our classical corpus are reflected in this esoteric episode. The fluid that circulates is primarily mantra, hence its primary locus in the mouth. It is also the substance of deity which enters through the top of the head, or the spot between the eyebrows, or the mouth. These are also the loci of semen in yogic tradition. The process of circulation begins with the entrance of the deities into the mouth of the adept—the devouring of the goddess (and the god). It ends (if a cycle can be said to end) with the power that has left the body of the adept coming back into him through his mouth as it entered in the first place. Again he devours the seed of the goddess, this time directly from his female partner. Thus he behaves like the *āśvamedha* stallion who swallows his own seed in transition between rituals of taking in fluid (the Indo-European mare's or the Tantric deity's) and giving fluids (the Vedic stallion's or again the Tantric deity's). The reversal of this is called "the fierce recitation"; the seed mantra goes directly into the mouth of the woman, the dangerous process of being devoured by the mare. It does not stop here, however, but returns to the man through the Tantric process of sexual reversal—the drawing of the fluid from the woman's vagina to the man's penis. This reversal makes the "fierce" process of being devoured by the woman safe once again: there is no ultimate loss of fluid. Indeed, by positing an endless cycle, the system becomes eternally sealed; there can be no loss, only the constant infusion of deity. Thus the fear of sexual death is overcome, as the fear of death in general is overcome through the concept of rebirth; steady decline and loss is replaced by a self-renewing cycle. In this way, the Tantric ritual allows the adept to gain immortality by being devoured by the goddess as well as by devouring her.

CONCLUSION: THE CYCLE TO END CYCLES

The refusal to devour or be devoured by the mare is a denial of her divinity. Indian mythology, like so many others, abounds in tales of goddesses who doggedly and ruthlessly torment those who deny

⁶⁰ *Pad-ma dkar-po*, "The process of generation of the wishing gem of the ear-whispered teachings," folios 1–19, trans. by Stephan Beyer, *The Buddhist Experience: Sources and Interpretations*, Religious Life of Man Series (California, 1974), pp. 140–53.

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them worship.⁶¹ The mare is feared because she is fierce because she is denied worship because she is feared.⁶² This pattern of denial is manifest on many different levels of the mythology: on the level of physiology, the male withholds his seed from the female; on the theological level, he withholds his worship from the goddess. In between is a continuum of encounters between mortal and immortal figures, encounters in which the male's refusal to give is both a cause and an effect of his belief that she will take his life's blood from him.

The circle of theological denial has one escape—ritual worship. If one seeks the goddess, her presence may be a source of power or a loss of power; she may bless or damn, feed or devour. Yet one *must* seek her, for the alternative is brutally clear: if she is ignored, she will certainly wreak havoc. When the goddess is worshiped and accepted in her full ambivalence, the worshiper asks her to be present with him always. If part of her nature is pestilence and mindless destruction, why should one want her near? Why not merely placate her and ask her to go away?⁶³ The answer to this may lie, at least in part, in her maternal nature: the essential function of the goddess is not her capacity to feed but to *be there*, even in her shadow aspect.⁶⁴ The only unbearable harm that the goddess can inflict on the worshiper is to abandon him—as she so often does. This, not the mutilation, is the source of devastating grief, the terrible longing for the vanished divinity. The only evil mother is the one who is not there.

Thus the worshiper invokes Sītālā even though she will infect him with smallpox if she comes to him. Without her, pestilent though she may be, his life has no value. To allow the goddess to devour one takes courage; the goddess remains ambivalent, and being devoured is a risky form of worship. Even when she is gracious, her grace is a terrifying and painful form of religious passion. But one has little choice in this matter. If that is the way that god is, what can one do? If she is denied, she is certain to be destructive; if she is worshiped, she may or may not be destructive,

⁶¹ See Manashā's vengeance in Dimock, Jr., "Goddess of Snakes" (n. 50 above); Dimock, Jr., and Ramanujan, "Goddess of Snakes" (n. 50 above); and Edward C. Dimock, Jr., *The Thief of Love: Bengali Tales from Court and Village* (Chicago, 1963), 197–294.

⁶² For this circularity in the genesis of South Indian village goddesses, see Brubaker, "The Ambivalent Mistress" (n. 33 above). For its psychological parallels in the relationships of Hindu men with their mothers and their wives, see Kakar (n. 27 above), p. 95, and O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, chaps. 2, 4, 6.

⁶³ For the theological implications of destructive grace, see n. 50 above.

⁶⁴ Kakar (n. 27 above), p. 84.

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and the worshiper may become immortal. The myth of Kṛṣṇa and Pūtānā demonstrates that the worshiper who treats the god as a mother treats a son is assured of salvation—even if she takes the form of an aggressive, destructive mother. But the theology of *bhakti* presents a two-edged sword: the deity, too, may become manifest in a destructive way, and still bring blessings, ultimate salvation and rebirth.

The psychological and theological circles present a pessimistic but not inevitable view of interaction with the goddess. For Tantric ritual may step in and introduce a reversal that short-circuits the compulsive self-perpetuation of destructive emotion. The ritual produces a special, highly structured, controlled context in which it is relatively safe to have sexual contact with the mare, to drain her fluids or even to be devoured by her. Moreover, it replaces the destructive cycle with another, creative cycle of fluids flowing into her mouth and back out of her womb, or the reverse (into her womb and out of her mouth), constantly reinfused with the power of deity. The devouring mare/whore gives back to the mature male worshiper who confronts her sexually the powers that the cow/mother took from him when he confronted her as a child—or as a nonworshiper. By reintegrating the split goddess, Tantric ritual transforms the mare who holds back milk and saps virile fluids into the invigorating goddess who gives life by giving and taking fluid, the goddess who gives birth not as a cow, with milk, but as a mare, with female seed.

This is the character of the goddess who holds sway over most of India today, villagers as well as kings. She is at once fertile and erotic, terrible and wonderful, *mysterium fascinans et tremendum*. In spirit, if not in form, she is our old friend the Indo-European mare.

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Cows and Mares

APPENDIX

	Eats	Eaten	Feeds	Kills	Killed	Gives life	Seduces	Seduced	Chaste	Mortal	Immortal
IRISH RITE	Mare	x	(x)		x	(x)		x			x
	King	x		x			x			x	
VEDIC RITE	Mare								(x)		
	King	(x)							x	(x)	
	Stallion	x	(x)		x	x		x			x
	Queen		x	(x)			x			x	
VEDIC MYTH (Vivasvant)	Mare	x				x		x			x
	King										(Vedic)
	Stallion		x		x		x				(Purāṇic)
	Queen (Saranyā)			x						x	
HINDU MYTH & RITUAL	Mare	x		x			x				x
	Cow		x		not killed	x			x	x	
TANTRIC RITE	Mare	(x)	x			x	x				x
	Cow	x		x					x	x	



Dionysus and Siva: Parallel Patterns in Two Pairs of Myths

Author(s): Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty

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Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty

DIONYSUS AND
ŚIVA: PARALLEL
PATTERNS IN TWO
PAIRS OF MYTHS

That Śiva and Dionysus bear a striking resemblance to one another has been known for a long time. The ancient Greeks noticed it, referring to Śiva as the Indian Dionysus, on the one hand,¹ and to Dionysus as the god from the Orient, on the other.² (The ancient Indians, with characteristic chauvinism, disdained to comment on the resemblance, if in fact they recognized it at all.) In recent times, scholars have pointed out numerous significant points of correspondence: wine, ecstasy, the bull, snakes, the mountains, nocturnal rites with drums and dancing, frenzied women, fertility, the imposition of an alien cult upon established orthodoxy, and, finally, the coincidence of opposites.³

As in any case of apparent parallelism, several different explanations are possible: a common original source in prehistory

¹ Strabo *Geography* 15.58, citing Megasthenes' *Indica*; he refers to the god in the mountains (Śiva) as Dionysus and the god in the plains (Kṛṣṇa) as Heracles; cf. also the peculiarly Indian episodes in Nonnus's *Dionysiaca*.

² Euripides, *Bacchae*, ed. with an introduction and commentary by E. R. Dodds, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 1–22.

³ Willibald Kirfel, "Śiva und Dionysus," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 78 (1953): 83–90; J. Bruce Long, "Śiva and Dionysos: Visions of Terror and Bliss," *Numen* 18 (1971): 180–209. Two other valuable studies of Dionysus, besides Dodds's brilliant commentary on the *Bacchae*, are Walter F. Otto's *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, trans. Robert B. Palmer (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1965); and E. R. Dodds's *The Greek and the Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951).

(in this case, perhaps a proto-Indo-European source); cross-cultural borrowing during the historical period (Greece from India, or the reverse); or independent origination (a hypothesis that incorporates the assumption of some sort of universal human substratum, of the kind posited by Freud or Jung, out of which the same myth arises independently in different cultures). In the context of these speculations, I propose to examine here in some detail two complex bodies of mythology from Greece and India dealing with each of the gods in a narrative dramatic form. Unlike the congeries of poetic fragments, vase paintings, inscriptions, coins, and descriptions of rituals that have been assembled by previous studies of the two gods, such sustained narratives are susceptible of analysis in terms of patterns of symbolism.⁴

These patterns indicate an underlying network of religious beliefs common to the two cults, a network at once more detailed and more basic than the generally "Dionysian" cluster of attributes recognized by existing scholarship. Whether this deeper continuum indicates cultural borrowing—on the argument that the greater the detail, the greater the likelihood of historical transmission—or independent origination—on the argument that the more basically "human" and integrated the matrix of belief, the more likely a universal basis for it—I am not prepared to say. It might, however, be useful to point out these suggestive parallel patterns, and to examine the degree to which the two traditions are based upon a common theology—despite certain major discrepancies in mood and style—before proceeding with the argument one way or another.

The dramatic sources that I intend to use for the myth of Dionysus are the *Bacchae* of Euripides and *The Frogs* of Aristophanes.⁵ For Śiva, they are the Purāṇic texts narrating a cycle of myths: the incest of Brahmā, the sacrifice of Dakṣa, and the encounter with the sages of the Pine Forest. Among the significant

⁴ Professor Long, in the article cited in n. 3 above, pointed out the general correspondence between the two myths but used it only to show how both gods were represented as outsiders breaking into orthodox religions.

⁵ For the *Bacchae* text, see n. 2 above; for *The Frogs*, see *Aristophanis Comoediae*, ed. F. W. Hall and W. M. Geldart, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907), vol. 2. The impetus for this essay came from a seminar on the *Bacchae* and *The Frogs* that I taught with James Redfield in the spring of 1979. I never would have had the ὄψις to teach such a course, let alone to publish out of it, had it not been for the encouragement of Redfield. Many of the ideas in this paper have been shaped and trimmed by his tactful criticism and his vastly greater knowledge of the classics; his steadying hand has rescued me from many of my excesses, as I rushed in where real classicists fear to tread; but of course, being a real classicist, he remains rather uneasy about some of my more unorthodox methods and conclusions.

differences between the two bodies of material are the dates of the texts (the Greek being far earlier than the Sanskrit), the uniqueness or multiplicity of the recorded versions (the Sanskrit yielding far more variants of the myth of Śiva than the Greek yields of the myth of Dionysus), the genre (Greek tragedy and comedy in dramatic form, Sanskrit narrative poetry), and the balance between tradition and the artist (the Greek authors being highly individual, the Sanskrit authors anonymous and far more bound by their aesthetic and dramatic canons). The *Bacchae* and *The Frogs* depict apparently unrelated episodes, expanding in different ways, and in different tones, upon certain shared themes. The Indian texts seem at first to supply separate episodes in a continuous story; in fact, however, the episodes echo and supplement one another's themes, functioning as multiple versions of a single story, much as the two Greek texts do. But where the symbolic pattern of the myth is concentrated in each (and both) of the Greek plays, it is distributed by the Sanskrit texts into different episodes in a single text and different versions of several texts.⁶

Not surprisingly, the differences in form are matched by equally significant differences in the conceptual content of the two traditions: the myths of Dionysus make certain points that are not made in the myths of Śiva, and the reverse. The two myths revolve around different family triads: Pentheus, his mother Agaue, and the god Dionysus in the Greek;⁷ Dakṣa, his daughter Satī, and the god Śiva in the Sanskrit. The two stories end in very different moods: death and mourning in the Greek, restoration and celebration in the Sanskrit. Yet, despite these variations, the myths of Dionysus and Śiva reveal a point-by-point correspondence that must make us speculate on what it is that both of them are saying.

I will begin with a summary of the stories of the *Bacchae* and *The Frogs* and an analysis of the symbolic patterns of the two plays; then a summary of the cycle of myths about Śiva, with an analysis of their corresponding patterns; and, finally, I will review the congruencies and speculate upon their significance. The summaries will, of necessity, omit much that is in fact central

⁶ For a discussion of the need for such a distribution of motifs in several versions, see Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 16–18 (hereafter cited as *Asceticism and Eroticism*), citing Edmund R. Leach, *Lévi-Strauss* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), pp. 59, 70.

⁷ The justification of including Dionysus in this family triad will be discussed at length below.

to the plays but not essential to the points that I wish to make here.

DIONYSUS IN THE *Bacchae* AND *The Frogs*

SUMMARY OF THE *Bacchae*

Semele, the daughter of Cadmus, had given birth to Dionysus, whose father, she said, was Zeus. Her sisters denied this story and, hence, denied the divinity of Dionysus. Semele had died, struck by a thunderbolt, when Dionysus was born. Agaue, another daughter of Cadmus, had married Echion, one of the dragon brood sown by Cadmus, and given birth to Pentheus. Pentheus, now king of Thebes, denied Dionysus and forbade his worship in Thebes, but Dionysus came to Thebes disguised as a mortal and inspired the daughters of Cadmus to worship him, dancing in ecstasy on the mountains. When Pentheus opposed Dionysus, attempting to imprison him, mocking him for his effeminate dress, and insinuating that the mountain dances were orgies, Dionysus mesmerized Pentheus, enticing him to spy upon the women and to wear the Bacchic women's costume himself. In their frenzy, the women, led by Agaue, tore Pentheus to pieces, and Agaue carried back his head, still believing that it was the head of a lion. As Cadmus brought her to her senses, she realized what she had done and accepted Dionysus's sentence: that she and her sisters should wander in exile from Thebes. Dionysus changed Cadmus and his wife into serpents.

SUMMARY OF *The Frogs*

Dionysus and his servant journeyed to Hades to bring back a poet to help save Athens in her time of need. Disguised at first as Heracles, Dionysus then decided to change places with his servant to avoid receiving the punishment meant for Heracles; later, they switched back again. In the mounting confusion, the denizens of hell decided to torture both of them in order to determine which of them was the god Dionysus, as Dionysus now claimed to be. When this failed to clarify the issue, it was decided that Pluto and Persephone should judge the case. Later, there was a contest between Euripides, Sophocles, and Aeschylus to determine which was the best dramatist and, hence, which one should be brought back to Athens. Dionysus chose Aeschylus and returned to Athens with him.

ANALYSIS OF THE TWO PLAYS

ANALYSIS OF THE *Bacchae*

The symbolic structure of the *Bacchae* turns upon the conflict between Pentheus and Dionysus. Pentheus is a mortal who does not understand what it is to be mortal; he does not know how he differs from the gods nor how his birth and life are inextricably caught up in the workings of the gods. He is also an animal who does not know what it is to be an animal, to have an animal birth and an animal lust. Dionysus is a god who at first conceals both his immortality and his animal nature in order ultimately to establish them and to prove that his birth and life are divine. The separate themes of unnatural birth, blurring of male-female boundaries, under- and overrating of blood ties, and relationships with animals (wild/tame, hunted/hunting) are interwoven with increasing complexity as the play develops. The three levels of god, mortal, and animal present intersecting dangers in the form of violated taboos.⁸

The danger of blurring the boundary between man and god is viewed on several different levels. It is *vβpυς* for a mortal to think he is a god. The chorus warns Pentheus that anyone who thinks "non-mortal thoughts" will have a short (i.e., very mortal) life (line 369); these "non-mortal thoughts" (τό τε μὴ θνητὰ φρονεῖν) imply the arrogance of thinking oneself a god (a theme often encountered in Greek tragedy). But they also imply the arrogance of forgetting that you are an animal (denying your own animal passions, the carnality that links you to the mortality of animals) and, on the other hand, the danger of thinking "sub-mortal" thoughts, of allowing yourself to be entirely engulfed by the irrational power of bestiality. Neither of these two animal pitfalls is avoided by Pentheus, who smugly disdains the lust that he falsely imputes to the Bacchae and expresses repugnance for them, while, on the other hand, he is quickly unmasked and overpowered by his own prurience and eagerness to witness their nocturnal orgies.

It is also *vβpυς* for a mortal to mistake a god for a mortal. If Pentheus wants to fight with a god (*θεομαχεῖν*), as he is repeatedly accused of doing, Dionysus will even the odds by changing him from a mortal not into a god, but into an animal; and this is what

⁸ It is interesting, and probably relevant, to note that these are precisely the three acts grouped together by Plato in his discussion of the taboos violated by the dreaming soul: intercourse with one's mother or with any other mortal or god or animal (*Republic* 571D).

he does. Finally, to be a man is defined not only as being a nongod and a nonanimal, but as being a nonfemale; this, too, is a distinction that Pentheus must learn the hard way, by being driven into a state of androgyny even as he is driven to be a man-animal and tricked into revealing his aspirations to be a man-god: Pentheus misunderstands the blurring of male-female boundaries in the god (teasing Dionysus for his effeminacy) and is made to experience it in himself, when Dionysus dresses him in women's clothing.

To realize one's nature is to realize one's birth, and the theme of supernatural birth (and androgynous birth) forms yet another spoke of the wheel of the *Bacchae*, fanning out beside the themes of mortal/immortal nature, human/animal nature, and male/female nature. To realize one's birth is to realize who one's parents are and what one's relationship with them is. For Pentheus, this involves an acceptance of his animal father, Echion, and a revelation of his strange relationship with his human mother. For Dionysus, it is a vindication of his human mother and a revelation of his immortal father. The final aspect of the relationship between gods and mortals is the illumination of the relationship of one's parents with one another, of the relationships between Semele and Zeus, on the one hand, and between Agaue and Echion—but also between Agaue and Dionysus. For the quintessential relationship between mortals and gods—particularly with highly sexual gods—is theogamy, intimate sexual contact with the god, which is the tragic undoing of both Semele and Agaue.

Semele and Agaue are both daughters of Cadmus, and both have nonmortal lovers. Semele has a god for a lover, which places her in a no-win situation: she is said to have been killed either because her lover was in fact immortal (so that she was struck down by Zeus to pacify jealous Hera [8–9]) or because she falsely claimed to have had an immortal lover (so that Zeus killed her for slandering him, as her sisters claimed [32–34]). Though Semele's claim to have had Zeus for her lover is voiced repeatedly and is implicit in the equally recurrent epithet given to Dionysus, "son of Zeus," it is also shadowed with doubt on several occasions. It is challenged when first stated (28–30) and implicitly doubted even by the well-meaning Cadmus when he suggests that it might prove a "useful lie" to have a god in the family (333–37), a lie which sticks in his throat when the god "born in the family" finally destroys them all (1250).

Upon the question of whether or not Semele slept with Zeus hangs the question of whether Dionysus is a god; this is stated

explicitly by Dionysus, Cadmus, and several other characters in the play. The question of the divinity of Dionysus lends great irony to Dionysus's final justification of his merciless vengeance. When Cadmus says that, since Dionysus is a god, he should not have indulged in a human's wrath, Dionysus turns the argument inside out: he disclaims any responsibility for the tragic effects of his vengeance by saying that Zeus is his father (i.e., that he himself is immortal), and that, being a god, Zeus had the power to make all these events take place by ordaining them all long ago (1348–49).

What is the nature of Zeus's supernatural fatherhood of Dionysus? It is, first of all, destructive. The first hint is of destruction to Semele rather than to Dionysus, and from Hera rather than from Zeus: Hera (the wife of Zeus and hence the stepmother of Dionysus) first is implicated in the death of Semele at the birth of Dionysus (9) and then is accused of having attempted to kill Dionysus (289–90). But the actual instrument of Semele's death is the thunderbolt of Zeus, eventually transferred to Dionysus himself, who touches his mother's tomb with fire (623–24) as Zeus had done (8), and then sends a thunderbolt at the moment of Pentheus's destruction (1082).

The danger in Dionysus's birth is associated with its androgyny: Zeus is his mother. The story of Dionysus's birth from Zeus's thigh is told twice by the chorus, who refer to the "womb of a man" (*ἄρσενά . . . νηδύν*), which is the thigh (*μηρός*) of Zeus (523–28; cf. 94–99). This is one of a number of "thigh-births" from male gods in the Indo-European corpus,⁹ including, as we shall see, the birth of various gods from Brahmā, the Indian counterpart of Zeus as father of the gods. Even in the *Bacchae*, the story of Dionysus's androgynous birth from Zeus is supported by several allusions to the birth of Zeus himself from Rhea under similar circumstances (60, 122, 130); Kronos swallows his children as Zeus places Dionysus inside his thigh, only to have them born out of him.

The story of Dionysus's birth from the thigh of Zeus is challenged by Pentheus, prompting Teiresias to offer yet another version of the abnormal birth: Zeus (again, to escape Hera) made a substitute Dionysus out of a piece (*μέρος*) or air and made it a hostage

⁹ Several instances are cited in Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 334–35 (hereafter cited as *Origins of Evil*); and *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 226–27, 308, 322 (hereafter cited as *Women, Androgynes*).

(ὠμῆρευσε) for Hera (242, 286–97). This, again, is used to emphasize the fact that Dionysus really *is* a god, born of a god, and, moreover, that he was a god fighting against a goddess (θεῖν θεός), a point cited in his favor and in vivid contrast with the accusation made against Pentheus, that he is a mortal fighting against a god.

Despite the awkward etymology based on the triple pun on “thigh,” “piece,” and “hostage,” and the lesser awkwardness of having two myths to explain the same thing, this last variant of the birth story sets the scene for the important theme of the substitute victim: Dionysus in this story has a substitute made of air, but in the usual Dionysian rituals the substitute for the god is the beast torn apart in the *σπαραγμός*, and in the course of the play it will be Pentheus himself, to whom this story of the “piece of air” is now being told. The foreshadowing of this event is balanced by yet another substitution that has already taken place in the past, for in the androgynous birth of Zeus a stone was substituted by Rhea for Kronos to swallow in place of Zeus.¹⁰

The birth of Pentheus is in many ways an inversion of the birth of Dionysus. Semele and Agaue are sisters, and as Dionysus’s birth was the death of his mother, so Pentheus’s mother will be the death of him. Echion, the counterpart of Zeus, is, like Dionysus, closely associated with serpents (507, 1025) and born without female agency. Pentheus ignores his serpentine birth, except on two striking occasions: when Dionysus points out that Pentheus does not know how he is living, nor what he is doing, nor who he is (οὐκ οἶσθ’ ὅ τι ζῆς, οὐδ’ ὅ δρᾷς, οὐδ’ ὅστις εἶ [506]), Pentheus retorts with an unthinking innocence that bears the weight of great irony: he parrots the conventional formula (“I am Pentheus, son of Agaue and my father Echion”), not knowing that the fact that Agaue is his mother will doom him to a ghastly death, and the fact that Echion is his father has given him a bestial nature that he does not understand and so cannot deal with, one that will also become literally real to him in his death, when his mother mistakes him for a beast. And in his final desperation, Pentheus tries to use that same formula to make his mother recognize who he is when she is tearing him limb from limb: “Mother, I am Pentheus, your son that you bore to Echion” (1119). Later still, Cadmus invokes Echion’s name to wake Agaue out of her madness to the terrible realization of what she has done (1274–76). Thus Pentheus’s

¹⁰ The theme of substitutes and of beasts as substitutes for children appears also in the scene in which the Bacchae suckle fawns and young wolves.

beast-nature is dependent upon his mortal birth and is a direct cause of his fight with the god.

Pentheus and Dionysus are mirror images of sexuality, particularly in their relationships with their mothers. Pentheus falsely accuses Semele of lying about her sex life (245), just as he repeatedly drops innuendos about the lust of the Bacchae (225) and about Dionysus himself (237–39, 354, 454–58). Of all the Bacchae, Agaue is by far the most important to him; he talks about her constantly, both as his own mother (whose unseemly, unmaternal frenzy appalls him) and as the most important woman in Thebes (whose undignified behavior Pentheus regards with the same priggish disapproval that he applies to Cadmus and Teiresias, dirty old men who ought to know better than to act as they do, in Pentheus's eyes). Agaue is the one of the Bacchae who murders him and who perhaps even eats him (1184),¹¹ two classical and widespread fantasies of the projection of a son's ambivalent erotic attachment to this mother.¹² Pentheus sees Agaue as the quintessential maenad and Dionysus as the seducer; the implication is that Pentheus views Dionysus as the lover of Agaue.

Pentheus's own guilty lechery is cunningly drawn out by Dionysus. Along with the lust that he projects from himself onto Dionysus, Pentheus draws to himself a number of Dionysus's qualities. He mocks Dionysus for his woman's clothing and long hair and then is made to wear them himself; Dionysus then mocks Pentheus, though Pentheus does not catch the irony (455, 493, 830, 926–32). When, at the moment of his death, Pentheus breaks out of the spell, he tears the wig off his head in hope of making his mother recognize him (1115–16), but his hair continues to convince his mother that he is a wild beast (1199). The hair is simultaneously the sign of a woman and the sign of an animal—as well as the sign of the ecstatic androgynous god.

This symbolism links the change in sexual roles (Pentheus shifting from moralizer to participant, and from man to woman) to a parallel change in animal roles. The hunter becomes the hunted; Pentheus threatens to behead Dionysus (241) and is

¹¹ Though this is a rather extreme form of the argument, I am pleased to note that Dodds accepts it: "We may find here a hint of a tradition in which *ᾠμοπαγία* as well as *σπαργμός* was practised on Pentheus. Cf. Oppian, *Cyn.* 4. 304, where P. is transformed into a bull, the maenads into panthers who rend and eat the bull; also the daughters of Minyas who tore and ate the child of one of them (Plut. *Q. Gr.* 38), and the cannibal feast prescribed by the god himself in a fragment of a late Dionysiac epic (Page, *Literary Papyri* i, no. 134)" (Dodds, ed., *Bacchae*, p. 224).

¹² See O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 190–202, for a discussion of other Greek myths on this theme and their relationship to the myth of Pentheus.

himself beheaded. Pentheus hunts the "bestial" Bacchae and the "bestial" god (227, 434, 870, 1019, etc.), but Dionysus hunts Pentheus (846) and is praised by the triumphant Bacchae for his hunting (1190–92). Dionysus is accused by Pentheus of "hunting" Aphrodite (458), and the witness of the Bacchic rites uses this same phrase in denying that the Bacchae were lustful (688); thus, the themes of Pentheus's projected lust and the hunter hunted merge with the theme of the false accusation of the god and the women. This combination also appears in Agaue's naive wish that her son will go hunting instead of fighting against the god (1255), an irony in the light of the fact that Pentheus fights the god by hunting him. So, too, the godless Akteon is doomed to a *σπαραγμός* foreshadowing Pentheus's when he simultaneously challenges the goddess and hunts too much (338–40).

Central to the image of hunting is the figure of the hound. When Pentheus hunts Agaue (721, 731), the Bacchae turn into hounds (731, 978) and hunt their enemies; this is the pivotal point of the reversal of hunter and hunted. The final irony comes when Agaue, on the very point of realizing what she has done, blames the hunters for her mistaken belief that the head she holds is the head of a lion, not the head of Pentheus (1278). A similar reversal of animal roles may be seen in the image of the snake. At first, the snake is associated with Dionysus and the Bacchae: Dionysus himself is a snake (1016) and has snakes on his head (102), as do the Bacchae, who also have snakes holding up their garments (697) and licking away the blood of the cattle they devour (767). Thus, when Dionysus turns Cadmus into a serpent he is making him, like Pentheus, become a creature who is at once a form of the god and a form of the mortal's true nature—a throwback to the dragon breed of Echion that Cadmus produced.

In the final scenes of the play, the lion and the bull are used, like the serpent, in symbolic contexts that further blur the line between god and mortal in an ominous way. Agaue's gruesome pleasure in disemboweling and beheading Pentheus is made possible by her persistent delusion that he is a lion or, more pointedly, the offspring of a lion (1142, 1173, 1185, 1195, 1212, 1278). That Pentheus himself is a lion is an aspect of the emergence of his suppressed animal nature; that he is the child of a lion reflects once again upon the motif of the mortal who is caught between a father who is a god and a father who is an animal—Zeus in the case of Dionysus and Echion in the case of Pentheus.

But Pentheus is not merely the child of a lion; he is the child of

a lioness: Agaue is a wild beast. Although she is not specially singled out for images of bestiality, she is the leader of the Bacchae, who are mothers to both fawns and ferocious wolves (700). Moreover, the Bacchae suckle these animals because they have abandoned their own human children (699), the telltale act of the evil mother; Agaue not only abandons Dionysus but murders him, in an inversion of the nurturing behavior of the wild beast who adopts an abandoned human child.¹³

This treatment of Pentheus is all the more bitter because of the way in which Dionysus has previously infantilized Pentheus: he dresses him up, as a mother dresses a daughter. At that moment, Pentheus is reminded of Agaue: he hopes he looks like her when he is dressed up (926) and he wants his mother to bring him home (966), as a small child might ask. Dionysus sardonically assures him that he will come home in the hands of his mother (969), an image reinvoked when the chorus speak of the joy of holding in your hands your child—streaming with blood (1164). When Agaue mistakes her child for a wild beast, therefore, the themes of the ambivalent mother and the ambivalent god converge in the question of precisely what sort of animal she is, and he is, and the child is.

Pentheus is not a lion; this is what makes the dismemberment so appalling. Dionysus, however, is a lion (1017), though Pentheus does not realize it. The symbolic pattern of the image of the lion perfectly balances that of the bull: Dionysus is called a lion only once (in the same phrase that calls him a bull and a snake), while Pentheus is mistaken for a lion many times; by contrast, Dionysus is called a bull many times, Pentheus only once. Dionysus is described as having the horns of a bull at the same time as he is said to have been born from Zeus (101). When Pentheus hunts Dionysus in the stable, the god appears as a bull (619) and then immediately provides yet another substitute for himself, made out of air (630). The bull thus conjures up the image of a substitute for a sacrificial victim, in this case Dionysus (whose substitute was made out of air to fool Hera [630]). When the Bacchae devour their god, they devour him in this form; so, too, the bull is a substitute for the hunters who would hunt the Bacchae: the Bacchae turn and hunt them, becoming hounds to devour not the men but the bulls (743–47). When Pentheus is bewitched, again he sees Dionysus as a bull, and Dionysus assures

¹³ Ibid., pp. 149–90, 241–52; another example of the evil mother in the *Bacchae* is Hera, who attempts to kill Dionysus.

him that this is his true form (920–24). Again Dionysus reveals himself as a dangerous bull (1016), and as a bull he leads Pentheus to his doom (1159). When Pentheus then appears as the final bull in the play, he takes the place of the god in symbol as well as in ritual for the last time, as his mother fondles his severed head (1185) and thinks of him as her calf. Pentheus is thus revealed as descended from a snake and transformed into a lion and a bull—the three simultaneous theriomorphic forms of the god whose existence he has so foolishly denied and who has made him the ultimate human substitute for his own *σπαργμός*.

ANALYSIS OF *The Frogs*

In plot as well as in symbolism, *The Frogs* resembles the *Bacchae*. Dionysus journeys to a strange land (Hades in *The Frogs*, Greece [from his native Asia] in the *Bacchae*); he changes clothes and roles with a mortal servant; he is physically maltreated (imprisoned in the *Bacchae*, beaten in *The Frogs*). This is the turning point, after which he himself takes command, judges others (Pentheus or the tragic poets), and emerges triumphant. Other aspects of the plots are mirror images: Dionysus, falsely accused of lechery in the tragedy, is hilariously lecherous in the comedy; and in the end, where he exiles the survivors of the *Bacchae* from Thebes, he leads back to Athens the poet in *The Frogs* who had been exiled in Hades.¹⁴

The main theme of *The Frogs* that links it to the *Bacchae* is the debate about whether or not Dionysus is a god. The question is first raised by Dionysus himself, who refers to himself at the beginning of the play with what sounds as if it is going to be his traditional patronymic epithet, "I am Dionysus, son of ———," but then breaks off and substitutes for the expected "Zeus" the self-mocking "Wine-jar" (22). Shortly thereafter, Dionysus asks

¹⁴ It would be convenient to be able to say that Aristophanes consciously satirizes the *Bacchae* of Euripides, but although this is possible, it is by no means certain. *The Frogs* was performed in 406 B.C.; the *Bacchae* was found among Euripides' papers after his death in the winter of 407–406. It is clear from the content of *The Frogs*, as well as from other sources, that Aristophanes hated Euripides and would perhaps have jumped at an opportunity to make fun of his last work; it is also a suggestive coincidence that the two plays were composed and performed during the same brief period of time. In any case, Aristophanes does satirize other plays of Euripides, including another one apparently about Dionysus (*The Frogs* 1211–13), but he never quotes a single line from the *Bacchae*. In the absence of more solid evidence, it is perhaps best to proceed with caution, treating the two plays as two different approaches to the same god, not necessarily aware of one another. I am indebted to David Grene for his advice on the point as well as for general background information on Greek drama and for his painstaking reading of several early drafts of this essay.

Heracles the quickest way to Hades (122), a question traditionally answered with ritual instructions, cosmic maps, and warnings; here it is literal-mindedly answered by Heracles with the advice that Dionysus should kill himself (by hanging, poison, jumping from a height, etc.). Dionysus's objection to this is not the fact that, as a god, he cannot die, but rather that he would prefer to avoid such discomfort; the (wrongly) supposed inability of gods to suffer discomfort later in the play becomes the criterion by which the god is to be distinguished from the mortal.

Once Dionysus reaches Hades, he is treated at first more like a god than like a mortal, in passages similar to those found in the *Bacchae*: the frogs praise Dionysus the son of Zeus (215) in a satire on a Bacchic chorus. In the *Bacchae*, Dionysus appears disguised as his own priest; in *The Frogs*, when he is temporarily out of control (as he had only seemed to be in the *Bacchae*), he calls out to his priest (in the audience) to save him (297). Thus the same figure—the priest of Dionysus—carries a very different weight in the two plays. So too, Pentheus does not know that the “stranger” before whom he maligns the “absent” Dionysus is in fact Dionysus himself; in *The Frogs*, the Bacchic chorus does not know that the figure standing before them is Dionysus, and so they call out to the god whom they think to be absent (325).

But the question of Dionysus's immortality becomes explicit when he changes clothes with his servant, Xanthias, and then turns around and reminds Xanthias that he (Xanthias) is a mere mortal (and a slave) and so should not presume to impersonate a god (530). This distinction between Dionysus and Xanthias is thrown right back at Dionysus when Xanthias repeats it, word for word, as a reason why he refuses to go on with the masquerade (which is beginning to be dangerous for the one impersonating the god [583–84]). The next twist comes when Dionysus tries to avoid being tortured by claiming that he is a god (628–31), presumably exempt on the grounds of sanctity as the free man is exempt on the grounds of law: only the slave could be tortured. To this, Xanthias eventually counters with the argument that Dionysus's divinity is a reason to torture him, not to refrain from torturing him, since, being a god, he will not mind it (634).

The paradoxes raised by these logical and theological shenanigans are a comic form of a very serious paradox at the heart of the *Bacchae*. The torture scene in that play is sinister indeed: Pentheus foolishly attempts to do physical violence to Dionysus (actually imprisoning him and threatening to behead him), though Dionysus

warns him that he will be punished for his impiety (490). When Dionysus performs a series of miracles and emerges from the prison, he remarks drily to the amazed Pentheus, "Can't gods step over walls?" (654), and begins to set the grisly trap that he has in mind for him. Why need he take revenge for a torture that never touched him? This paradox is implicit in Cadmus's question at the end: why should a god take revenge like a mortal? The answer is never given in the *Bacchae*, nor in *The Frogs*, where it is channeled into the question of the trial by torture: all seem to agree that the one who does not mind the torture will in fact be the god, but the scene is unresolved: Dionysus masks his cries as poetry or prayer, and the flogger, Aiacus, says that he cannot decide which one is the god (669).

The problem is then transferred into another sphere more easily susceptible of resolution: Aiacus finally suggests that since he knows that Pluto and Persephone are gods, they might decide the more difficult question of the divinity of Dionysus (670). Unfortunately, this sensible idea is never carried through; we never learn what the judgment of Pluto and Persephone was. The second half of the play begins abruptly with another test (the trial of the poets, instead of the trial of Dionysus), in which Dionysus is treated like a god just as if there had never been any question about it. In the first half of the play, Dionysus assumes the role of the ribald buffoon, the *βωμολόχος*, a stock figure in Greek comedy; in the second half of the play he is abruptly transformed into Dionysus, patron god of Greek tragedy.

The mockery of Dionysus in the first half of the play is, in part, a result of the wholesale utilization of the bag of tricks of the *βωμολόχος*, but it is also a result of the natural coalescing of the obscenity inherent in that figure and the genuine sexuality and bestiality inherent in Dionysus. Dionysus in the *Bacchae* is wrongly accused, by Pentheus, of being lecherous; he is, in fact, not guilty of the things that Pentheus imagines about him. Dionysus is, however, highly charged with powers of eroticism and fertility, both cosmically (for he is the principle of generation, vegetation, and ecstasy) and psychologically (for his serpentine androgyny, his cruelty, and his lawlessness are sexually compelling). In *The Frogs*, by contrast, Dionysus is merely and thoroughly lecherous: he lusts for a maenad whose breast has become exposed in the dance (410-15); in the *Bacchae*, Pentheus falsely accuses Dionysus of lusting for the *Bacchae*, and then of lusting for him, but they do not; they bare their breasts merely

to suckle wild animals, not to entice men. In *The Frogs*, Dionysus lusts after a dancing girl of a different type, complaining that Xanthias (his alter ego) will take the girl while he (Dionysus) looks on with his penis in his hand (545). This particular form of lechery is, as we shall see, also characteristic of Śiva.

The mockery of Dionysus implicit in these scenes is carried over into several other episodes, satirizing Dionysus's animal instincts (primarily lechery and gluttony). The association of Dionysus with the lion, that carried such sinister overtones in the *Bacchae*, is present throughout *The Frogs* in the form of the lion skin that Dionysus wears in imitation of Heracles, in place of his own usual fawn skin. Along with the lion skin, Dionysus takes on Heracles' reputation for having a monstrous appetite (550), a clear parallel to the horrible appetite of the *Bacchae*: Heracles's garlic and cheese replace the blood and flesh and wine of their cannibalism, which is referred to in *The Frogs* when the chorus mentions the bull eating of the Bacchic rites (357).

The deep relationship between sexuality and eating underlies much of the horror of the *Bacchae*; it is also at the heart of the comedy of *The Frogs*, as indeed of much low comedy the world over. The mockery of Dionysus brings out the animal quality of the god not in a sinister way, as in the *Bacchae*, but in a relaxing and reassuring way: god is, after all, a creature who shits and farts just like every body else, but not *just* like everyone else—Gargantuanly, cosmically, hilariously. Dionysus shits and regards it as a libation for which the god should be called (479); his fart is identified with the frogs' Bacchic chant (255–56); and his anus is where his heart is (482–84). The religious implications of the first two jokes are clear enough, and become clearer still in the context of other mythologies, where god is often said to emit the world through his anus.¹⁵ The trickster farts himself up into a tree and falls into a mountainous pile of his own shit, but the trickster is god.¹⁶ The location of the heart in the anus is, again, on this plane a reflection of the widespread folk belief that the creative center of the deity is not the head but, rather, the anus and genitals.¹⁷ Thus the farting and shitting of Dionysus is brought in not only because it is the staple of all low comedy but also because it has cosmic overtones. It is indeed music-hall stuff, but it is also part

¹⁵ Cf. O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, p. 140; and Alan Dundes, "Earth-Diver: Creation of the Mythopoeic Male," *American Anthropologist* 64 (1962): 1032–1105.

¹⁶ See Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), pp. 25–27.

¹⁷ O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, pp. 139–40.

of an earthy world view that is not so foreign to the rationalistic and moralistic Greeks as may at first appear.

The laughter of Dionysus has different moods, each adding depth to the others. In *The Frogs* he appears first as the butt of comedy, the βωμολόχος; but even this figure has obscure sacred associations, as his name implies (the "altar-waylayer," who hung about the altar to scavenge bits of meat);¹⁸ and in the second half of *The Frogs*, Dionysus is on the other side of the line, as the patron god of comedy making jokes at the expense of others. This ambivalence is implicit in the *Bacchae*, where he is at first the object not of scatological laughter (as in *The Frogs*) but of the angry sarcasm of Pentheus; then, as the tide turns, the sinister smile of Dionysus, god of comedy, becomes cruelly fixed as he treats Pentheus as a ribald fool, a βωμολόχος haunting the altar. Thus the mockery of the god may appear on one level as a sophisticated bit of blasphemy, a theatrical naughtiness; but on another level it is a traditional part of the worship of any god of fertility, and must be taken in deadly earnest.¹⁹ The mockery of the phallic god is at the very heart of the Indian myth, to which we will now turn.

ŚIVA IN THE MYTHS OF DAKṢA'S SACRIFICE AND THE PINE FOREST

Although the myth of Dakṣa and the myth of the Pine Forest occur in isolation in Sanskrit texts, they are often explicitly linked.²⁰ Moreover, they may usefully be viewed as two variants of a single theme: the story of a maverick god who is not recognized, who visits those who deny him worship, is attacked by them, attacks them in turn, and is ultimately revealed to be god. Finally, these two myths together provide a more compelling and enriching parallel to the story of Dionysus than is presented by either of them alone.

I will tell the Indian myths in greater detail than I devoted to the Greek because they are not as well known, but, even so, it will be necessary to select and reduce the materials far more than in the case of the Greek. The Sanskrit tradition is far more rococo, in part as a result of the later date of the recorded text (the Sanskrit having had much more time to elaborate upon its stories) but more as a result of the innate verbosity of Indian myth

¹⁸ Grene's understanding of this comic figure is the basis of my own.

¹⁹ See O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 72-76.

²⁰ O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, pp. 310-11.

and the exigencies of the fluid oral tradition: each variant omits details which it assumes (rightly) would be known to the general Indian audience but feels free to expand upon other details neglected in some versions. In selecting the details to tell for the purpose of this particular comparative study, I will flesh out the bare skeleton of the plot with those details that bear most directly upon the Greek materials. Other selections from the same data, highlighting other significant aspects of the myth, have been treated at length elsewhere.²¹ This version is taken from a single text, albeit a rather late one, the *Śiva Purāṇa*;²² in the analysis that follows, I will supplement it with variants from other texts.

The myth of the sacrifice of Dakṣa is framed by two partial multiforms presented as a prologue and an epilogue.

PROLOGUE: THE INCEST OF BRAHMĀ

Brahmā, the grandfather of the world, created Śiva and Dakṣa and commanded them to produce children. Dakṣa begat many daughters, whom he gave to various sages as wives, but Śiva at first remained chaste. When Brahmā created Dawn as his daughter, Kāma, the god of erotic love, inspired Brahmā and Dakṣa with lust for her. Śiva rebuked them for their shameful deeds, and from Dakṣa's sweat as he restrained himself was born a woman, Dakṣa's daughter Rati, whom he gave to Kāma to be his wife. Sati, another daughter of Dakṣa, was given to Śiva to be his wife.

THE SACRIFICE OF DAKṢA

One day, Dakṣa performed a sacrifice to which he did not invite Śiva, for he hated him, nor Sati (though she was dear to him), for she was Śiva's wife. When Śiva refused to attend the sacrifice, since he had not been invited, Sati insisted on going there without him. After she arrived, she rebuked the sages who were there, but Dakṣa continued to revile Śiva and to look upon Sati with hate. In anger and humiliation, Sati killed herself by burning her body in the fire of her own power of yoga.

When Śiva learned of this, he tore out a cluster of his matted hair, from which a horrible demon named Virabhadra was born. He instructed Virabhadra to burn up the sacrifice of Dakṣa and

²¹ O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 111–40; *Origins of Evil*, pp. 272–320; and *Hindu Myths: A Sourcebook* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1978), pp. 25–34, 116–25, 137–49 (hereafter cited as *Hindu Myths*); see also J. Bruce Long, "Dakṣa: Divine Embodiment of Creative Skill," *History of Religions* 17, no. 1 (August 1977): 29–60.

²² *Śiva Purāṇa* (Benares: Paṇḍita-Pustakālaya, 1964), 2.2.1–43; 4.12.

all who were there. The demon and his demonic throng seized the sacrifice, which had taken the form of a wild animal to flee, and beheaded it; they mutilated other gods, outraged the goddesses, and polluted the sacrificial fire with excrement and filth. Then Virabhadra found Dakṣa hiding in terror behind the altar; he dragged him out, cut off his head, and threw it into the fire.

Brahmā and the other gods went to Śiva and praised him, begging him to restore Dakṣa and all the others, and promising to give him a share in the sacrifice. Śiva restored them all, giving Dakṣa the head of a goat, the sacrificial animal. Dakṣa arose and rejoiced; though he had hated Śiva in the past, his mind was now clear. At first, his passion and longing for his departed daughter kept him from praising Śiva, but then, in shame and humility, he praised Śiva and bowed low before him. And Śiva gave Dakṣa permission to complete his sacrifice, in which a full share was given to Śiva.

EPILOGUE: THE CASTRATION IN THE PINE FOREST

Sages lived in the Pine Forest with their wives. One day, Śiva took on a disguise to test them: he came there naked, holding his penis in his hand and making lewd gestures. Some of the sages' wives were terrified; others flocked to him, embracing him and pushing one another aside. When the sages saw what was happening, they exploded in fury, shouting at him, "Who are you? Since you are violating Vedic law, let your penis fall to the ground." When they said this, Śiva's penis fell down and moved down into hell and up into heaven and all over the earth, never remaining still for a moment and burning everything everywhere it went, like a great fire. The gods and sages, who still did not recognize Śiva, asked Brahmā to help them; he advised them to ask Pārvatī to take the form of the vagina to hold the penis of Śiva, and to worship him in that form. The sages propitiated Pārvatī and the bull-bannered Śiva, and Pārvatī held the penis and kept it calm, and all the worlds rejoiced.

PATTERNS OF REPETITION IN THE INDIAN CYCLE

Before comparing the Greek and Indian materials, let us compare the separate parts of the Indian text to show how they function as a unit.

The prologue establishes certain paradigms that persist in the later episodes of the myth. The explicit incest of Brahmā pre-

figures the later, implicit incest of Dakṣa. Both Brahmā and Dakṣa are punished by Śiva for their incest, as Śiva himself will be reviled and punished by Dakṣa and the Pine Forest sages for his untamed eroticism. In the text I have cited, Brahmā is merely rebuked, but in other variants of the myth more ancient, numerous, and famous than this one, Brahmā takes the form of an animal to pursue his daughter, who has also taken the form of an animal, and Śiva beheads him as he flees.²³ So, too, in other variants, Dakṣa's incestuous relationship with Satī is far more explicit,²⁴ and even in the present text, Dakṣa admits that he had only given Satī to Śiva to marry because Brahmā had made him do it. Thus, Brahmā and Dakṣa are aspects of a single figure.

A more complex identification links Śiva and Kāma. Śiva, the ascetic, is apparently opposed to Kāma; in other variants, he burns him up and revives him again even as he destroys and restores Dakṣa and the sages. Yet both Śiva and Kāma marry daughters of Dakṣa, and in the epilogue in the Pine Forest, Śiva plays an erotic role, inspiring lust in the sages as Kāma inspires lust in Brahmā and Dakṣa, and inspiring anger in them as Kāma inspires anger in Śiva. Śiva and Kāma share the generally "Dionysian" trait of blatant eroticism; but Śiva's symbolism extends to include a far more complex cluster of Dionysian qualities, such as his androgyny and his role as a dancer.

Though Kāma is occasionally said to be an androgyne (to be born with his wife as half of him rather than to receive her from Dakṣa),²⁵ the androgyne is far more closely associated with the other male figures in the prologue. Brahmā is often said to be an androgyne, who creates many creatures from his thigh as a womb.²⁶ In imitation of Brahmā, Dakṣa is also an androgyne; he also scorns Śiva for this very quality, for Śiva is by far the most important Hindu androgyne, sharing his body with his wife—Satī or Pārvatī.²⁷ The problem of androgyny demonstrates the degree to which the conflict between Dakṣa and Śiva is based not only upon their opposition (mortal vs. god, father-in-law vs. son) but upon their identity (two creative androgynes, both sexually attracted to the same woman).

The central episode, the sacrifice of Dakṣa, is tied to the Pine

²³ *Āitareya Brāhmaṇa* 3.33–34; *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.1–6; see O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, pp. 25–35.

²⁴ O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 128–30.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 71–72, 117–18.

²⁶ O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, pp. 334–35; *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 311–14.

²⁷ O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 314–34.

Forest epilogue in several ways, primarily through the motif of heresy and redemption. During the argument at the sacrifice, Dakṣa claims that he has excluded Śiva because Śiva is an outcaste and a heretic, a violator of proper rituals, insane, without known parents; he also accuses Śiva of more orgiastic forms of heterodoxy: Śiva dances and wanders about naked, frenzied by drugs. But Dakṣa then goes on to curse Śiva in such a way that apparently imposes upon Śiva from that moment the very habits for which Dakṣa has already condemned him: Śiva is to be beyond the pale of the sacrifice, shunned by all society, and to have no share of the sacrifice with the other gods (the very justification that Dakṣa has already cited as his reason for not having invited Śiva in the first place).²⁸

This complex curse, self-begetting and self-fulfilling, is then extended: Dakṣa curses all the followers of Śiva so that they will be heretics and drinkers of wine, expelled from Vedic rituals; in response, Nandin, the priest of Śiva, proclaims that since Dakṣa and his followers did not know Śiva, they would become lustful Brahmins in the thrall of anger and pride. These two groups of sages, cursed by Dakṣa and Nandin, are the lustful and angry heretic sages of the Pine Forest, as is made explicit in several other versions of the myth that emphasize their emotions, their heresy, and the cause of these flaws: the curses given at the sacrifice of Dakṣa.²⁹ This simple causation is inverted, like the curse given to Śiva himself (cursing him to be what he has been), when Sati tells the sages at Dakṣa's sacrifice to treat Śiva with respect, for (she reminds them) when Śiva wandered into the Pine Forest, disguised as a beggar, and the sages cursed him, Śiva burnt the entire universe with his disembodied phallus. Thus the sacrifice of Dakṣa is both the cause and the result of the encounter in the Pine Forest.

The particular detail that Sati chooses with which to remind the sages of that encounter forms yet another link between the two episodes: it is the motif of castration. In several texts describing Śiva's attack on Brahmā or Dakṣa, he is said to mutilate the gods: he cuts off Sarasvatī's nose, knocks out Pūṣan's teeth, tears out Bhaga's eyes, and rips off Bhṛgu's moustache; in yet another text,

²⁸ A similar dislocation of time and causation appears in other versions of the story of Dakṣa, in which Dakṣa argues that he will not invite Śiva to the sacrifice because Śiva carries a skull—the head of Brahmā, a multiform of the very head of Dakṣa that Śiva is about to cut off as a result of not being invited to the sacrifice because he carries a skull. . . ; see O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, pp. 277–86.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 272–30.

he is said to cut off the testicles of Kratu, the embodiment of the sacrifice.³⁰ Later, Kratu is restored along with everyone else, just as (in the myth on which this episode is based), Indra is castrated and then given the testicles of a ram, more potent than those he had lost.³¹ The parallels between these mutilations and the beheading of Dakṣa, restored with a goat's head, need not be labored. But the explicit parallel comes in the epilogue, when Śiva himself is castrated and restored and, in some variants,³² makes the sages temporarily impotent until they restore his phallus and worship it.

In other variants of the Pine Forest myth, Śiva is not castrated; instead, he dances with the wives of the sages and, when the sages attack him, he continues to whirl their weapons up in his dance and to whirl them into flame even as his penis bursts into flame in our version of the story. This incident is, in turn, an echo of yet another episode in our text, a version of the encounter between Śiva and Dakṣa, in which Śiva appears as a dancer before the parents of the girl he wishes to marry (Pārvatī, a reincarnation of Satī). He enchants all the women in the city, including Pārvatī's mother, but when Pārvatī's parents then attempt to throw him out, he blazes up like a fire and then vanishes, leaving the parents full of devotion to the dancer, whom they now recognize as the god Śiva.³³ Here, as in the sacrifice of Dakṣa, the parents resist their daughter's marriage to Śiva; he appears as a destructive fire and is recognized as a god. And, as in the Pine Forest, the erotic dancer enchants the women, is attacked, vanishes, and is finally recognized. In all three of these episodes, the male figures attempt to protect their women from Śiva; they mock and attack him; he destroys them with fire and is finally worshiped.

PATTERNS IN THE INDIAN AND GREEK MYTHS

Both the Greek and the Indian texts are metamyths, myths about myths, and, more particularly, myths about rituals. The Greek

³⁰ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.7.4.1–8; *Varāha Purāṇa* 33.4–34; see O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, pp. 116–18, 122–25.

³¹ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 12.7.1.10–12, 5.2.3.8; the link between this myth and the restorations of Śiva and Dakṣa is right in the text: "Indra lost his virility. The gods used the ram, the male goat, and the bull as recompense. And therefore the bull is sacred to Indra." In later texts, Indra is given the testicles of a ram alone (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.48.1–10; *Mahābhārata* 12.329.14.1–2; *Padma Purāṇa* 1.56.15–53); see O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 133–34; *Hindu Myths*, pp. 94–96.

³² Versions recorded by Wilford and Sonnerat, cited in O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 181, 184.

³³ *Śiva Purāṇa* 2.3.30; for Śiva as the dancer, see also O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 130–48.

texts deal with the Bacchic rites and the theatre of Dionysus; the Sanskrit with the Vedic sacrifice, the offerings to Śiva, and the worship of the phallus. There are disquieting transitions from life to ritual and back: the mortal opposes the god on an official ritual level, but the god then uses his ritual in a personal and sadistic way, until the mortal is catapulted back into the public ritual.

The self-awareness of the myth produces a kind of play within a play. The *Bacchae* demonstrates how Dionysus lures Pentheus into participating not only in the ritual but in the myth about the ritual, the myth that Pentheus does not believe in: the myth of the substitute birth and the substitute victim. In *The Frogs*, the dramatic poets discuss at great length the truth or falsehood of the myths in their plays and, on the other hand, the effects that these myths have upon real life.³⁴ In the course of Dakṣa's sacrifice, Sati narrates the story of the Pine Forest though it has not yet occurred, and Dakṣa scorns Śiva for having an epithet that he will receive only as a result of what Dakṣa is about to do. Both cycles, therefore, are about the way that myths become real to people who do not want to believe in them.

The particular myths that become real in our texts depict the way in which mortals learn to accept their own human nature, though they may at first deny it; through intimate contact with those who embody the extremes of that nature, among gods and animals, they learn the ways in which they do and do not differ from gods who are animals. We have seen these patterns at play in the Greek texts, and the Indian points of comparison are patent. Dakṣa first denies his bestiality by suppressing his eroticism, which bursts out to become Rati, the wife of the god of erotic love; he then channels his excessive love for his other daughter, Sati, into his hatred of her husband, the god; when this, too, bursts out in the sacrifice, Dakṣa is literally transformed into the beast he always was. So, too, the Pine Forest sages deny their eroticism and (therefore) misunderstand their god until they are forced to acknowledge their passion and his.³⁵ To accept Śiva as god, therefore, is to cease to regard oneself as a god, above human passions and scornful of passionate gods, in order to begin the ritual by which one hopes to tame one's own animal nature.

³⁴ For a discussion of this argument, see Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, "Inside and Outside the Mouth of God: The Boundary between Myth and Reality," *Daedalus* (Spring 1980), pp. 93-105.

³⁵ O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, pp. 307-10; *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 172-210; see also Richard L. Brubaker, "Lustful Woman, Chaste Wife, Ambivalent Goddess: A South Indian Myth," *Anima* 3 (1977): 59-62, for a discussion of the sage's projection of his own suppressed lust.

Pentheus and Dakṣa are wrong about themselves in the same way that they are wrong about the god; as they do not know themselves, they do not know him. They think they are better than they are, and they think he is worse than he is; they project onto him the qualities that they cannot accept in themselves. It is surely significant that in both sets of myths the god is falsely accused of licentiousness; some of his more extreme actions seem expressly designed to *épater les bourgeois*, to make people think that he is worse than he is. The injustice of the accusations made against the god is affirmed by Euripides' insistence, in the solemn choruses of the *Bacchae*, on the deadly serious, sacred rather than sensual nature of the joy and ecstasy in the mountains; and it is affirmed in the myths of the Pine Forest by repeated straightforward statements of the fact that Śiva did not seduce the women, though their husbands thought he did.³⁶

The courting of such a false accusation is part of the cult of the Pāśupatas,³⁷ a sect of worshipers of Śiva represented both by Śiva himself (who enters the Pine Forest in the form of a Pāśupata, one of his own worshipers, as Dionysus pretends to be his own priest) and by the sages, who are taught to be Pāśupatas in some variants of the myth. The Pāśupata was chaste, but he would act as if he were not, so that everyone would say, "This is no man of chastity; this is a lecher." And by this false accusation, he would transfer to them all of his accumulated sins (his bad karma) and take from them their merits (their good karma).³⁸ By his erotic appearance and gestures, his nakedness, ithyphallicism, and dancing, Śiva excites the women and infuriates their husbands, but he himself does not actually do anything wrong. He eggs them on to misjudge him and attack him, so that he can exorcise their suppressed feelings and give them his forgiveness in a spirit of love greater than before, like lovers reunited after a quarrel.

The confrontation between the worshipers and the god is set forth in the form of three problematic sexual encounters: the hierogamy (marriage with the god), the incestuous impulse, and the transformation into a sexual animal. Though they are

³⁶ O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 172–83; *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 185–98, 273–75.

³⁷ Numerous correspondences between the Pāśupatas and the Cynics are surely relevant to this discussion, though perhaps distracting from the main points of the analysis; see Daniel H. H. Ingalls, "Cynics and Pāśupatas: The Seeking of Dishonor," *Harvard Theological Review* 55, no. 4 (October 1962): 282–98.

³⁸ *Pāśupata Sūtra*, with the commentary of Kaunḍinya, Trivandrum Sanskrit Series 143 (Trivandrum, 1940), 3.6–19; see Ingalls, pp. 287–91; and O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, p. 183.

inextricably related, we have attempted to separate them in the Greek sources and will continue the attempt in the Sanskrit.

The hierogamy in the Greek myth takes the form of an explicit challenge to the myth of the birth of Dionysus from a mortal woman and an immortal male; the explicit parallel to this in the Sanskrit is the problem that Dakṣa sees in marrying his daughter Satī to Śiva. Although Dakṣa and Satī are technically nonhumans, they are not in fact immortals (both of them die in the course of the myth, though they are revived), and the relationship of Satī to Śiva is the very paradigm of the relationship of the worshiper to the god, for Satī is the good wife (the "suttee") who cannot live without her husband and whose action in this myth establishes the precedent for the immolation of widows; she is the very model of the woman who regards her husband as a god.³⁹ On this level, Cadmus and Semele would be the counterparts of Dakṣa and Satī; in fact, however, this is not the case. As we have seen, the central triangle in the Greek myth is Pentheus, Agaue, and Dionysus—the mortal, his mother, and the god—while in India, the triangle of Dakṣa, Satī, and Śiva is that of the mortal, his daughter, and the god.

This contrast has been noted in another context: the oedipal conflict in Greece is that of child, parent, and parent's spouse, while in India it is parent, child, and child's spouse.⁴⁰ In both of the myths that concern us, the mortal who opposes the god is of the same generation as the god and is, moreover, technically either his brother (Śiva and Dakṣa both being born of Brahmā) or his cousin (Dionysus and Pentheus born of two sisters, daughters of Cadmus). Cadmus and Brahmā are the grandfathers in both myths, and are literally addressed as such. So, too, the sisters of the female protagonists play the same role in both myths, siding with the mortal male against the god and being punished for this (along with the female protagonist herself): the sisters of Agaue and Semele become the Bacchae, driven to madness, and the sisters of Satī, who attend the sacrifice without her (a circumstance that, in some variants, is what finally piques Satī's indignation and envy to the point where she disobeys Śiva and

³⁹ O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 88–122.

⁴⁰ This formulation, which is A. K. Ramanujan's, is sketched out in his "The Indian Oedipus," in *Indian Literature: Proceedings of a Seminar*, ed. Arabinda Podder (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1972), pp. 127–37. I am indebted to Ramanujan for discussing with me a more fully developed exposition of this hypothesis, which he will publish soon. See also Robert P. Goldman, "Fathers, Sons, and Gurus: Oedipal Conflict in the Sanskrit Epics," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 6 (1978): 325–92.

goes to the sacrifice without him), are among the goddesses and women mutilated by Śiva and his minions (mutilation of women, such as the cutting off of the nose, normally being the sentence for promiscuity). The sisters represent a kind of judgment by society as a whole against the antisocial god, the transgressor of boundaries.

The problem of the mortal's relationship with the god is thus given sexual overtones as it falls into step with the problem of the mortal's relationship with mortal women in his family. The danger of union with the god is the danger of reaching out to someone too far away; the danger of incest is the danger of succumbing to the temptation of someone too close.⁴¹ These themes reinforce one another and are further highlighted by the third strand of this complex, the problem of the mortal who ignores and therefore is overwhelmed by his identity as an animal, a creature simultaneously symbolic of divinity and sexuality.⁴²

We have seen how Pentheus is made to recognize the bull-god by becoming an animal himself—the bull, lion, and snake that are Dionysus's triple identity (*Bacchae* 1017)—and by being beheaded like an animal. All Hindu gods are closely tied to animals through their vehicles (*vahanas*), the animals that "carry" them both literally, in iconography, and in the sense that whenever one encounters one of these animals one is encountering a mascot and embodied form of the god. In addition to this general theology of gods as animals, Śiva is the god particularly regarded as the god of animals, and most particularly associated with three animals that correspond to the Dionysian troika: bull, lion (or tiger), and snake. Śiva is often mocked (by Dakṣa and by others) for riding on a bull, wearing a tiger skin (the equivalent of Dionysus's fawn skin/lion skin), and being draped in snakes.

Unlike Pentheus, Dakṣa is not transformed into any of the animals that represent the god he denies; but, like Pentheus, he is transformed into the sacrificial animal, the goat. Tigers or lions were never sacrificed in India; snakes appear in myths as sacrificial animals only in the inverted sacrifice that frames the true sacrifice in the *Mahābhārata*;⁴³ and though bulls were once sacrificed in

⁴¹ These dangers combine in the Rg Vedic dialogue between Yama and Yami (10.10), in which Yama rejects the sexual advances of Yami both because she is too close (his sister) and too distant (a goddess); see O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 176–77, 182–84; *Hindu Myths*, pp. 62–65; and cf. Robert P. Goldman, "Mortal Man and Immortal Woman: An Interpretation of Three Ākhyāna Hymns of the Rg Veda," *Journal of the Oriental Institute of Baroda* 18 (1969): 273–303.

⁴² The animal is also symbolic of incest, according to the Freudians; see O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 204–8.

⁴³ *Mahābhārata* 1.13–53.

ancient India, the taboo on killing cattle had put a halt to this ritual long before our myth was recorded.⁴⁴ When Dakṣa is sacrificed, therefore, he is transformed into a goat.

This goat is, however, strongly symbolic of several of the gods in the Dakṣa myth. In most variants of the prologue, Brahmā takes the form of a series of animals (horse, bull, goat, ram) to commit incest with his daughter, who has assumed the forms of mare, cow, nanny goat, and ewe.⁴⁵ When Śiva pursues Brahmā, Brahmā flees in the form of a beast to escape, but Śiva succeeds in beheading him.⁴⁶ The goat, as quintessential sacrificial animal in post-Vedic Hinduism, is the “vehicle” of Agni, god of fire and patron of the priest who tends the sacred fire; as Śiva absorbs much of the mythology of Agni, the goat is his animal, too, appropriate to Śiva, as to Agni, for its reputation for lechery as well as its sacred role. Moreover, the goat is specifically associated with castration and with the bull, as we have seen.

The beastly nature of Dakṣa’s sexuality and of his hatred of Śiva is underlined by one variant of the myth of the sacrifice, in which Dakṣa receives from the Goddess a magic garland. He places it upon his bed and becomes so excited by its perfume that he makes love that night in the manner of a mere beast; because of this evil, Dakṣa began to hate Śiva and even Satī.⁴⁷ But it is the beastly nature of Śiva that is most closely tied to the myth of Dakṣa’s sacrifice. For underlying this myth is yet another ancient cycle in which the gods exclude Śiva from the sacrifice and divide the beasts among themselves; when Śiva beheads the sacrificial beast, the gods give him a portion of the sacrifice and proclaim him lord of beasts, slayer of cattle.⁴⁸ The gods mutilated and deformed at the sacrifice say that they have been reduced to the condition of beasts; when they humble themselves before Śiva, and agree to be his beasts, and to make him lord of beasts (Paśupati), he agrees to restore them all, reminding them that he had deformed them because they were like “beasts” in failing to recognize his divinity.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ O’Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 241–55.

⁴⁵ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.4; see O’Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, p. 82.

⁴⁶ *Āitareya Brāhmaṇa* 13.9–10; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.7.4.1–8; cf. O’Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 111–41; *Origins of Evil*, p. 274; *Hindu Myths*, pp. 116–18.

⁴⁷ *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* 7.30.27–50; see O’Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, pp. 249–51.

⁴⁸ *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* 2.1.2; *Tāndya Mahābrāhmaṇa* 7.9.16; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.7.4.1–8; *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* 4.2.12; see O’Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, pp. 171, 274.

⁴⁹ *Varāha Purāṇa* 33.3–24.

Dakṣa's sacrifice is a reenactment of the first encounter of the gods with the beast-god Śiva *in illo tempore*, collapsed into the present moment for Dakṣa. The "sacrifice of Dakṣa" is a theological pun, a sacrifice that Dakṣa thinks is "by" Dakṣa, but that he comes to learn is "made of" Dakṣa, when he substitutes for the sacrificial beast. The animal head that he is given in the end is his true head; the human one was a mistake, an illusion that he arrogantly accepted as reality. In getting the goat's head, Dakṣa comes home at last to his true nature.⁵⁰

In the Pine Forest, the sages do not actually become animals, but they are bound up with the cult of Śiva as Lord of Beasts, Paśupati. At the end of the encounter, Śiva teaches them the merits of the worship of Paśupati; at the same time, he teaches them to worship him in the form of a phallus, the *liṅga*. Their acceptance of Śiva as Lord of Beasts and Lord of the Phallus is an acknowledgment of their own nature as animals, subject to lust like all animals, rather than as sages who think that they can cast out lust and anger merely by withdrawing into the forest.

The Greek and Indian myths are part of a larger corpus of stories in which deities who are resisted punish those who do not believe in them. Throughout Indo-European mythology we encounter the story of the intrusion of a charismatic god into a routinized cult.⁵¹ The theme of the denial of the orgiastic god in India may be traced back to the *Rg Veda*, where Indra, a phallic god and a dancer, a counterpart of Zeus and an antecedent of Śiva,⁵² is challenged: "He about whom they ask, 'Where is he?',"

⁵⁰ An interesting example of this is the Vedic myth of Dadhyañc. Originally a horse, Dadhyañc had the form of a sage when the Ásvins asked him to tell them the secret of the elixir of immortality. They gave him (back) a horse head, removing his human head; he told them the secret with that head; Indra, jealous of the elixir, cut off the head, and the Ásvins (themselves horse-headed gods) restored Dadhyañc's human head. The true head, of Dadhyañc as of the Ásvins, is the horse head, that has the knowledge of immortality, though the central transition (human to horse) is here framed with two inversions (horse to human, before the myth begins, and back to human at the end). See O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, pp. 56–60.

⁵¹ This corpus can be traced in Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, 6 vols., rev. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955–58). Motif C 50, "Tabu: offending the gods"; C 57, "Neglect of service to deity," subdivided into "Neglect of sacrifice to deity," "Fraudulent sacrifice," and "Punishment for having refused to take part in Bacchic rites" (only attested in Greece, not surprisingly). Other relevant themes are A 173.2, "Gods imprisoned"; A 177.1, "God as dupe or trickster"; and Q 221.1, "Discourtesy to god punished." Still other motifs from the cycle seem to be distributed beyond Indo-European bounds: K 1811, "Gods in disguise visit mortals"; K 1301, "Mortal woman seduced by a god"; T 111.1, "Marriage of a mortal and a god"; Q 552.1.7, "Woman who accuses saint of raping her is struck by lightning"; and Q 552.1.8, "Infidel defies god to strike him with lightning. God does." See also tale type 939, "The offended deity."

⁵² O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 84–89.

or they say of him, the monstrous one, 'He does not exist,' . . . He, my people, is Indra."⁵³ So too, the Greeks referred to, "Zeus, whoever he may be."⁵⁴ These are traces of the more general myth of denial and acceptance. What is apparently peculiar to the Dionysus/Śiva corpus is the complex pattern of interaction between the mortal, the god, the mother/daughter, and the animals.

CONCLUSION: THE HAPPY ENDING

In the film *Never on Sunday*, the good-hearted Greek prostitute (played by Melina Mercouri) gave happy endings to all the Greek tragedies; at the end of *Medea*, in her rendition, the children turn out to be alive after all, and everyone goes to the seashore. In Indian drama, too, there is no such thing as tragedy; all the potentially tragic motifs are twisted around and given happy endings. Thus in the *R̥g Veda*, the goddess Urvaśī cold-heartedly abandons her mortal lover, Purūravas, and replies with sarcasm to his agonized threats of suicide;⁵⁵ but when the playwright Kālidāsa gets ahold of the story, he has her return to him and live happily ever after, presumably going often to the seashore.⁵⁶

The *Bacchae* is a tragedy. At the end, all the human protagonists are destroyed, Pentheus horribly killed, all the others exiled, deformed, and condemned to live out the rest of their days haunted by the memory of the things the god made them do. The Indian myth, by contrast, ends with Dakṣa both restored and enlightened, the Pine Forest sages happily engrossed in their new cult. Pentheus remains unrelenting to the very end, like every bona fide Greek hero who challenges the gods, of whom Oedipus is perhaps the paradigmatic example;⁵⁷ and one suspects that Euripides sympathizes with Pentheus for this, as indeed for his deep revulsion toward the bloodcurdling excesses of the cult. Dakṣa and the Pine Forest sages repent of their evil ways, bow down before the new god, and are restored to life with powers and knowledge far greater than before, by the grace of the now-satisfied god. They are given a second chance, and they take it. The more literal-minded Greek tragedy cannot indulge in such a reversal or does not wish to do so; although a virtue of capital

⁵³ *R̥g Veda* 2.12.

⁵⁴ Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 160. And Pentheus says that the stranger, "Whoever he may be," commits *hubris* by saying that Dionysus is a god.

⁵⁵ *R̥g Veda* 10.95.

⁵⁶ Kālidāsa, *Vikramorvaśīya*.

⁵⁷ It is surely relevant in this context that Oedipus struggles not only with the gods but with his mother and with an animal who is half snake, half lion.

punishment, it has been suggested, is that it teaches you a lesson, this is a lesson that only a character in a Hindu myth can benefit from. Agaue is left alive at the end to realize the meaning of it all—who she is, how she is living, and what she has done—but as she never did resist the god (except, perhaps, by having once been one of the sisters of Semele who denied that Zeus was Semele's lover) she cannot be said to have been taught a lesson. She is merely a pawn that Dionysus picks up in order to destroy Pentheus and then discards.

Pentheus is never given a second chance. The lion's head that Agaue mistakes for his does not actually become his; it remains steadfastly, and gruesomely, a human head. When Dakṣa loses his head, the gods act on his behalf to anticipate his own ultimate contrition; they pray to Śiva for him, and Śiva makes the animal head become Dakṣa's own. This intervention turns the tide of the myth. So, too, in the Pine Forest, Brahmā and Pārvatī act on behalf of the sages to calm Śiva down and to bring him into a frame of mind in which he is willing to restore what he has destroyed. These interventions are made possible by the ritual and philosophical context of the Indian myth, embedded in a religion in which ritual makes all things possible, in which destruction is merely a prelude to re-creation, and every story has a happy ending.

Both the Greek and the Indian view of the relationship between man and god belong to the type of theodicy that Paul Ricoeur has characterized as "tragic": gods are jealous of men and oppose them when they seem to be too happy, or even too good.⁵⁸ Starting from this premise, however, the Greek and Indian myths develop in different directions, the one leading the hero deeper and deeper into the trap of arrogance and a doomed refusal to worship a god who behaves even worse than humans are supposed to do, the other allowing the hero to acknowledge the reality of the god even while he comes to know how truly awful the god is.

In this context, the mockery and torture of the god are tests of the mortal, not of the god; this is certainly how it appears from the point of view of the god and of the storyteller. These attacks are also forms of worship. Dakṣa could not perform a sacrifice against Śiva even when he tried, since, by "killing" the offending sacrifice Śiva was in fact performing it, acting as the sacrificial priest; similarly, the Pine Forest sages came to love Śiva more after he had baited them into attacking him. Pentheus became

⁵⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

the victim of Dionysus in the ultimate (albeit unwilling) act of surrender and devotion. These passionate attitudes to the god are instances of that peculiar form of devotion known as "hate-love" in Sanskrit (*dveṣa-bhakti*) or German (*Hasslieb*). They demonstrate the irresistible, inescapable attraction of the god, whether or not one wants to worship him.⁵⁹ Since the god embodies passion and emotion, anger and lust, the worshiper whose anger or lust drives him to deny the god is by virtue of that very denial offering himself up as a victim in a sacrifice whose meaning he does not understand.

One crucial factor that distinguishes the Indian from the Greek myths is the storyteller's attitude toward the god. Of course, seen from the standpoint of the god, neither of the myths is a tragedy; if one regards Dionysus and Śiva as the heroes, both are tales of happy triumph. But through mortal eyes it is difficult, though not impossible, to regard Dionysus as the hero of the *Bacchae*; yet it may be that we are intended to do so, disturbing though it may be. Certainly Dionysus is wronged, and for us, as for the *Bacchae*, there is an uncomfortable force of magnetism in his sinister powers. So too, it is difficult, though not impossible, to regard Pentheus as the hero. Despite his pomposity and cruelty, he is trying to do what he thinks to be right (and what Euripides may have thought right). It is precisely this ambivalence that lends subtlety as well as power to the play.

But there can be not a moment of hesitation in accepting Śiva as the hero of his myths. His gruesomeness is explicitly regarded as erotic in the Sanskrit tradition;⁶⁰ his cult would have been an accepted part of the life of anyone listening to the stories of these myths. Moreover, since Śiva is regarded as God, rather than as a god, his unsavory aspects are unequivocally creative. Dionysus's smile is sinister and cruel; Śiva has a horselaugh (*aṭṭahāsa*) that is terrifying and destructive but that also vibrates in such a way as to create new life.⁶¹ Śiva is at once more cosmic and more banal than Dionysus; he destroys the universe at doomsday, but he is also henpecked by his wife Pārvatī.⁶² Features such as these tend to make the Indian worshipper both more reverent to him and more genuinely fond of him than the Greeks were toward Dionysus. That Pentheus never comes to understand the meaning

⁵⁹ O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 213–18; *Origins of Evil*, pp. 277–85.

⁶⁰ O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 236–50.

⁶¹ Cf. the creation of Gaṇeśa from Śiva's laugh in *Varāha Purāṇa* 23.

⁶² O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 72–76; *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 224–26.

of his sacrifice, while Dakṣa and the sages do, is as much a reflection of the difference in the minds of the particular authors of the texts in which these myths appear as it is a reflection of an important difference between the gods themselves. Perhaps it was the difference in the gods that made the Indians more willing than the Greeks to hear the myths from the god's point of view.

University of Chicago



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Speaking in Tongues: Deceptive Stories about Sexual Deception

Wendy Doniger / *University of Chicago*

All over the world, people tell stories in which a man or a woman (or a god or an animal) secretly or magically replaces someone else in bed. The basic themes take on many different forms, and express many different meanings, in different retellings throughout the world. There are Rachel and Leah, and Tamar and Judah, and (I think) Ruth and Naomi in the Hebrew Bible; Amphitryon and Narcissus in the Greek and Roman traditions. There are Isolde and Brangene in the medieval European tradition, and all those Tristans. There are the masquerades in Boccaccio, and in Chaucer. There are sexual masquerades in so many Shakespeare plays, especially *Twelfth Night* and *Measure for Measure*. There are the nineteenth-century Gothic doubles in English literature (*The Woman in White*, *Dorian Gray*, and *Dracula*). And then there are the sexual doubles in contemporary films (*Tootsie*, *Yentl*, *Dead Ringers*, *The Return of Martin Guerre*). What Shakespearean scholars call “the bed trick” is a theme that apparently never loses its appeal.

These stories are inherently paradoxical, for our double is *not* us. By definition, it is where we are not, and therefore things happen to it that do not happen to us. Moreover, mirror images and shadows are not exactly the same as the figures that they “double.” Mirror images are inverted, and shadows are colorless (or a darker color), shape-changing, and often not there (this quality of discontinuous existence being what, according to Otto Rank, made shadows natural metaphors for the soul).¹ What is it, then, that makes us say that the double is “the same” as the person who is doubled? I would like to explore this question, and the implications of the various responses that it might inspire, by considering the development of the oldest variant that I know, the ancient Indian story of Samjña.

¹ See Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, trans. and ed., with an introduction, by Harry Tucker, Jr. (New York: New American Library, 1971).

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This is a deeply religious story. For, in addition to human questions about incest, stepmothers, rejected children, and unwanted husbands, the Samjna story raises theological questions about the origin of the human race and human death, about appearance and reality, about the relationship between male and female divine powers, and about the nature of the relationship between humans and the divine. The metaphysical question of the origin of the human race is posed in the fate of Saranyu's second son, Manu. And the metaphysical question of death is posed in the mythology of Saranyu's first son, Yama.

THE MYTH OF THE SUN AND THE SHADOW

The story of the Sun and the Shadow (Vivasvant and Chaya) is told *in nuce* in the Rg Veda, composed in Sanskrit in Northwest India, ca. 1200–1000 B.C.E.,² where it belongs to the class of Vedic literary endeavors which are styled in the Vedas themselves “riddle or charade” (*brahmodya* or *brahmavadya*).³ As the later Indian tradition attempts to unlock the riddle of Samjna, it draws upon many deep-seated, often conflicting, ideas about human and divine sexuality and masquerade. In a variant in the Markandeya Purana (ca. 250 C.E.), the story is retold in full detail, in the context of the genealogy of the universe (which precedes this episode) and of the human race (which follows from it):

Samjna married Vivasvant, the Sun, and bore him a son, Manu, the lord of creatures; then she bore him twins, Yama, the king of the dead, and his sister, Yami [or Yamuna]. But she was repulsed by the heat of the sun and afraid of his semen/energy. She looked at her own shadow [Chaya] and said, “I am going away to my father's house. Please stay here and be kind to my three children, and do not speak of this to my lord.” The Shadow said, “Even if I am dragged by the hair, even if I am cursed, I will never speak of your intention, O goddess. Go where you wish.”

When Samjna heard what her shadow said, she went to her father's house and remained there for some time, though he advised her to go back to her husband. Eventually, she took the form of a mare and went away.

Meanwhile, the Sun, thinking that the Shadow was Samjna, begat in her two sons and a daughter [i.e., another Manu plus Yama and Yami?]. The first son was the equal of the Manu who had been born before, and so he was called “Manu of

² *Rg Veda*, ed. Max Müller (London, 1980–92), 10.17.1–2. For a complete translation of this text and the following Puranic version, see Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), pp. 56–70. For an analysis, see Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 164–203.

³ Maurice Bloomfield, “Contributions to the interpretation of the Veda III: The Marriage of Saranyu, Tvastar's daughter,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 15 (1893): 172–88, here p. 172.

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the Same Kind” or “Manu Born of the Look-alike” [*savarni*]. But the Shadow did not behave as affectionately to the first-born children as Samjna had behaved to them, who were her own children. Manu put up with this in her, but Yama could not bear it. He threatened the shadow Samjna with his foot, and she cursed him: “Since you threaten with your foot the wife of your father, your foot will fall off.” Then Yama and Manu went to their father and Yama said, “Mother shuns us, the older sons, and favors the two younger ones. I lifted my foot toward her, but I did not touch her body with it, and she cursed me. I do not think she can be my mother, for a mother does not behave badly even toward badly behaved sons.” His father said, “It is impossible to make the words of the wife of your father fail to come true, but I will do you a favor, because of my affection toward you. Worms will take flesh from your foot and go to the surface of the earth. Thus her words will come true, and you will be saved.”

Then the Sun realized that the Shadow was not the true mother. He went to Samjna’s father, Tvastr, the blacksmith of the gods, who trimmed away his excessive energy, and then he took the form of a stallion and approached his wife, who had taken the form of a mare. When she saw him approaching she feared it might be another male, and so she turned to face him, determined to protect her hind quarters. Their noses joined as they touched, and the seed of the Sun entered the nose of the mare, engendering in her the equine twin gods called the Asvins.⁴

In this text, this story of the Sun and the Shadow introduces the section known as “The Glorification of the Goddess” (*Devimahatmya*), one of the earliest and still one of the most important texts of the worship of the Goddess, *Devi*. This is a most significant move, for it comes at a moment when the dominant (male) Sanskrit tradition was just beginning to incorporate into its texts the corpus of stories about female divinities (goddesses) who had long been alive and well and living in the non-Sanskritic, vernacular traditions. In aid of this appropriation, the old Vedic myth (about a goddess, *Saranyu*, who was no longer worshiped even in the *Rg Veda*,⁵ and a sun god who was worshiped both in the *Rg Veda* and at the time of the Puranic text) serves as a bridge to, and perhaps a validation of, the new Puranic myth (about a goddess, *Devi Mahishamardini*, who is just beginning to be worshiped).

The goddess is named Samjna, which means, significantly, “sign” or “image” or “name,” and her surrogate is her *chaya*, her mirror image or shadow—a creature who is her opposite either in inversion (the mirror image) or in color (the shadow). Her son Manu (presumably Manu the son of *Vivasvant*, *Vaivasvata*) is born first, and of the same mother as are the twins. Then *another* Manu is born, Manu *Savarni*, and, presumably, another set of twins. The subsequent development of the text indicates

⁴ *Markandeya Purana* (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1890), pp. 103–5; O’Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, pp. 66–70. Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

⁵ See O’Flaherty, *Women*, pp. 149–65.

that we are the descendants of the second Manu, not the first. The name of the second Manu is a pun: "Manu of the Same Kind" or "Manu Born of the Look-alike" (*savarni*); that is, if it is simply descriptive, he himself is a double, but if it is a matronymic, his mother is the double.

The mortality and/or the mutilation of the Sun (and, more significantly, the son of the Sun) is a pivotal point of the myth: some texts argue that Samjna, herself a goddess, left the Sun because he was inadequate for her (crippled and mortal) and some that she left him because he was too glorious for her, *resulting* in his mutilation. The pun or riddle about the foot, together with the mutilation that it so vividly describes, is a recurrent theme in this corpus; recall, for example, the Sphinx's riddle for Oedipus ("What goes on four feet in the morning, two feet at noon, and three feet in the evening?"). In Sophocles' play, as in the story of Yama, the mutilated foot is a synecdoche for the mortality of the body as a whole (like Achilles' heel); and in the Greek play, as in the Hindu myth, the child is mutilated as a result of having double mothers. The Sanskrit text actually conceals a triple pun, for "foot" (*pada*; cognate with Latin *pes*, *pedes*; French *pi  *; and English "foot") also means a measure of poetry (as it does in English), and the trick of the poem is what saves Yama's foot.

The mortality of Yama is closely related to the nature of his brother Manu, the ancestor of the human race. The first wife bore Manu and the second wife bore a double of Manu. Thus we are descended not only from a shadow mother but from a shadow Manu, as well. And Manu's mother is doubly unreal, for the name of the first wife means "the sign" or "the image" or "the name," and the name of the second wife means "the shadow." Samjna is the Signifier. (Her name contains the verbal root *jna*, cognate with the Greek *gnosis*, and *sam*, cognate with the Greek *sun*, Latin *con*; she is thus the *co-gnoscente* or *connoisseur*). Since the word or name is the double of the thing or person, Samjna is her own double from the start. And perhaps it is relevant to note here that *chaya* in Sanskrit also means a commentary on a text. Thus if Samjna is the text, Chaya is the commentary; if Samjna is the dream, Chaya is the secondary elaboration. Moreover, Samjna may also be a riddle term for Sandhya, a name of the Dawn; the doppelg  nger woman is then evening twilight, and the Sun has two wives.⁶ The parallels between Samjna and Sandhya are striking: each is the wife of the Sun, ambivalent and incestuous.⁷ Moreover, both of them also designate linguistic symbols: just as "Samjna" means "sign" or "image" (as we shall see), so "Sandhya" becomes the term for the "twi-

⁶ Herman Lommel, "Vedische Einzelstudien," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* 99 (1949): 225-57, 243-57 for Saranyu-Samjna.

⁷ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Darker Side of Dawn*, Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, vol. 94, no. 1 (Washington, D.C., 1935).

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light speech” of later Hindi poetry, a speech marked by riddles, inversions, and paradoxes. Yet, ultimately, Samjna (“the sign”) and Chaya (“the shadow”) are mere reflections of the energy of their husband, the Sun, a powerful astronomical image of male domination. (Here it is relevant to recall that, in both the Vedas and the Puranas, the Sun was the object of worship and Samjna was not.)

But as anthropogonies, these stories are saying more than this. It is surely significant that, in so many myths of this type, the children, usually twins, are abandoned by the mother. The myths seem to be saying that we, the descendants of Manu, are the children of the image, children of *maya*, not the children of the real thing.⁸ It embodies the Vedantic view that we are born into illusion, live in illusion, and can only know illusion.

THE Gnostic PARALLEL: SOPHIA

Before turning to our more general analysis, let us consider one particularly revealing parallel to the story of Samjna, the Gnostic story of Sophia, whose name means “knowledge” and whose domain, *gnosis*, is, as we have seen, cognate with the name of Samjna. In moving from Vedic and Puranic texts to Gnostic texts we are shifting not merely languages but academic genres since the different questions that scholars of Indology and Gnosticism have chosen to ask about these two very different sets of texts have led to the development of radically different disciplines. But for the purposes of this essay, I have chosen to disregard these differences and to focus on the similarities that I personally see in the texts, bringing my own set of tools (Indological, structuralist, etc.) to Gnostic texts that are generally regarded as the bailiwick of scholars who do not usually reach for the same tools to crack their codes. I hope that the reader will be willing to bracket [*epochē*] these methodological concerns in order to cut to the chase: the goal of mutual illumination of homologous structures.

Sophia is the key to a Gnostic mythology in which carnal knowledge is deconstructed in favor of spiritual knowledge. The particular incidents involving the doubling of Sophia may be viewed as offshoots of the basic Gnostic contention that God himself is a double, and that we are all the children of a better God than God.

Trouble begins in the divine pleroma when Sophia desires to *know* the Father without the embrace of her consort; as a result she produces an abortus, made of her passion, which becomes the stuff of creation. Eventually a lower version of Sophia is produced, Achamoth, a twin on the

⁸ See Stella Kramrisch, “Two: Its Significance in the Rgveda,” in *Indological Studies in Honor of W. Norman Brown*, ed. Ernest Bender (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1962), pp. 109–36.

lower level, who unites with the Demiurge and the Savior to produce humanity.⁹ In the end,¹⁰ Achamoth will leave the lower realm, return to the Pleroma, and receive the Savior as her bridegroom in the divine bridechamber.¹¹

Another transformation of the theme occurs in other Gnostic texts: when the evil archons prepare to rape Eve, she splits Sophia off from herself (as she does in other Gnostic texts, for other reasons); Eve then stands behind a tree and watches, laughing, while the archons rape Sophia, thinking that they have Eve.¹² One of them even rapes the reflected *image* of Sophia in the water, and as a result of this act certain classes of beings are engendered.¹³ In one text, Eve becomes a tree, as part of her masquerade to escape being raped.¹⁴ Elaine Pagels, following Bentley Layton and Birger Pearson, sees this as an allusion to the Tree of Life in Genesis, but also as an echo of Wisdom as a “tree of life” in Proverbs 1–4.¹⁵ And she remarks, “Partaking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge reveals to the man and the woman the secret truth—the antithesis between sexual and spiritual knowledge—that the archons tried to obliterate.”¹⁶ And Pagels goes on to illuminate the irony in this “knowledge”:

The archons, responding with their characteristic error, go to meet Norea in order to seduce her. Their ruler declares to Norea, “Your mother Eve came to us”—sexually (*Hyp. Arch.* 92, 20–21). But Norea challenges them all, for, in her view, it is a case of mistaken maternity. She attacks them where they are most vulnerable; again they are confusing sexual with spiritual knowledge: “You did not *know* my mother; instead, it was her female counterpart that you *knew* (*Hyp. Arch.* 92, 23–25).” Having raped the female *plasma*, they imagined that they had “known” Eve. Norea declares, however, that they never “knew” her, since she is “known” only spiritually. Norea sets them straight: having mistaken her mother’s identity, they mistake hers as well.¹⁷

⁹ Ptolemy, on Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.7.1.

¹¹ See the ritual of the bride chamber in the Gospel of Philip. I owe these citations from Gnostic texts to John Gager, who first made me aware of them when I lectured on this subject at Princeton on November 4, 1985, and then gave me the precise references in a letter of November 5. And to Ioan Culianu I owe the Manichean parallels: Franz Cumont, *Recherches sur le Manichéisme* (Brussels: H. Lamertin, 1908), 1:54–68.

¹² On the Origins of the World, 2.4.113 ff.; Hypostasis of the Archons, 2.4.89 ff.; *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, trans. J. M. Robinson (Leiden, 1977), pp. 152–60.

¹³ *Corpus Hermeticum* (= *Poimandres*) 13 ff.; see similar reflections in *The Apocryphon of John* (2.1.4 ff.) and *Hypostasis of the Archons* 87 ff.

¹⁴ Hypostasis of the Archons 89, 25–26. See also Birger Pearson, “She Became a Tree . . .,” in *Images of the Feminine*, ed. Karen L. King (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

¹⁵ Elaine Pagels, “Pursuing the Spiritual Eve: Imagery and Hermeneutics in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and the *Gospel of Philip*,” in King, ed., pp. 187–206, here p. 196.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

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For, as Pheme Perkins points out, the rape is ultimately meaningless; “The ‘spiritual Eve’ remains untouched by the lust of the powers, who can only defile/impregnate her shadow.”¹⁸

For though “knowing” is a euphemism for the sexual act in many languages (all ultimately deriving from the biblical Hebrew usage and extending into biblical Greek as well: when the angel tells Mary that she is going to have a baby, she replies, “How can that be, since I do not *know* a man?”),¹⁹ the myths demonstrate that people often literally do not know who they are in bed with. The Rabbis say that since “to know” in Hebrew means both “to love” and “to have sex with,” just having sex with someone is not really “knowing” that person. It may well be that it is because men have given most of our texts their final form that those texts speak primarily of a woman being entered and known, and of a man as having (carnal) knowledge of the woman; the man is the knower of the woman-as-field (of knowledge, and of progeneration), just as the Hindus speak of the soul as the knower of the body-as-field (*ksetrajna*). In these texts, the man goes inside the woman’s head as well as inside her body,²⁰ and in this sense he claims to know more about her than she, who cannot enter him, knows about him. But the inadequacy of this formulation is often demonstrated by the very text that makes it in the first place: all that the man learns is a lie: she can conceal a number of things, including her very identity, by virtue of that very passivity that was to give him the advantage in knowing.

SEXUAL KNOWLEDGE AND SEXUAL IGNORANCE

Why is the question of knowing the other expressed through a story about the bed trick? It is, I think, because the sexual act is the most “doubling” and “undoubling” of acts. Where all other doubles split into two, sexual doubles split into one. That is, there are all sorts of reasons, sexual and nonsexual, for an individual to proliferate personalities, but in the sexual act, the opposite happens: two become one, as the double (the couple) coalesces into the one “beast with two backs.”²¹ The myths of sexual doubles represent this tension between the urge to diverge and the urge to merge.

Moreover, the sexual act is simultaneously the most deceptive and the

¹⁸ Pheme Perkins, “Sophia as Goddess in the Nag Hammadi Codices,” in King, ed., pp. 96–112, here p. 110.

¹⁹ Luke 1:34: “Pos estai touto, epei andra ou gignosko?”

²⁰ See Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *Other Peoples’ Myths: The Cave of Echoes* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), chap. 1, for the myth of the sage who goes inside the hunter, in the Hindu embodiment of this metaphor.

²¹ Iago uses this phrase to Brabantio, in Shakespeare’s *Othello* (I.I.117).

most truth-revealing of human acts. People are more deceptive about sex than about anything else. We lie to ourselves about who our partners are and who we are. As Lord Henry remarks, in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "When one is in love, one always begins by deceiving one's self, and one always ends by deceiving others. That is what the world calls romance."²² And later, in response to Basil's remark that "Love is a more wonderful thing than art," Lord Henry retorts, "They are both simply forms of imitation."²³

Yet, despite all the lies that surround it, there is a brutal honesty in the sexual act. Bodies do not lie. Thus, the Hindus believe that a god or demon who masquerades as someone else in bed is compelled to take his own true form when he loses mental control and hence inadvertently turns off the current from the magic projector in his mind; this happens when he sleeps, gets drunk, gets angry, dies, or makes love.²⁴ If there is *veritas in vino*, there is surely *veritas in coitu*. It is the outer trappings that lie; at the still heart of the sexual storm is truth, for some people their only truth.

This, then, is another paradox, compounding the paradox of the double that is both us and non-us: the sexual act is simultaneously the most deceptive and the most truth-revealing of human acts.

THE DECEPTIONS OF LANGUAGE

Language and metaphor are the instruments of deception in the mythology of sexual masquerade. Women are riddles throughout this corpus, but they are also riddlers. We have noted in the myth of Samjna the riddle of the mortal foot that is also the meter of poetry and the riddle of the woman who is the Signifier, and we have noted a parallel with the Sphinx's riddle, which wins Oedipus his throne but costs him his happiness. The riddle is itself a double, often turning on the double meaning of a word or a phrase: the trick is to find out what the second meaning is, to identify the surrogate—which is also the point of so many of the

²² Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Donald L. Lawler (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), p. 200.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

²⁴ Thus, when the demon Jalandhara impersonates Siva and attempts to seduce Siva's wife, Parvati, he sheds his seed and she immediately recognizes him. See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Shiva: The Erotic Ascetic* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 185–86. And when the demon Adi impersonates Parvati in order to seduce Siva, he resumes his own form when he simultaneously consummates the sexual act and dies. See *ibid.*, pp. 186–90. There is also a cluster of signs that are always present to reveal the true nature of a god, if you look closely: unlike mortals, gods do not sweat or blink, their garlands do not fade, there is no dust on their clothes, and their feet do not quite touch the ground.

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stories of sexual masquerade. Samjna embodies the riddle of the relationship between the Sign and the Shadow, the Text and the Commentary.

The truth of myths is, like the sexual act itself, a two-edged sword, for they are both liars, and they are both truth tellers. The form and content, the myth and the masquerade, converge: the story and the sexual act are the two great doublers. Masqueraders pretend, and stories pretend, and yet their pretenses ultimately provide a kind of truth that is otherwise unattainable.

François Flahaut has commented on the relationship between narrative and sexuality: "Every human being has two umbilical cords: one, made of flesh, is cut at birth; the other, even before conception, weaves a person into language. But not only can this second cord never make up for the cutting of the first, it is itself an ambiguous, or paradoxical, umbilicus: it connects only by keeping apart; it plunges each person into the immense universe of meaning only at the price of an irrevocable break. . . . Fictional narratives are one of the forms of compromise (sexual life is another, and the most basic) which seek to reduce this paradox."²⁵ The paradox of linguistic alienation argues that the original unity of languages (in Eden) was shattered at the time of the tower of Babel; narratives seek to heal that break, when one person tells a story and the other says, "Yes, I understand; that's my story, too." But, the deconstructionists argue, we never do understand another person's story. Similarly, the paradox of sexual separation argues that when the (Lacanian) umbilical cord is cut, we are separated from our mother; sexual union seeks to heal that break, when one person joins physically with another (and so, Genesis tells us, a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they are one flesh). But then the sexual partner may abandon you just as your mother did or turn out not to be the person you think he or she is.

When these two paradoxes of linguistic and sexual alienation, the tower of Babel and the paradox of sexual separation (from the mother), are simultaneously addressed in narratives about sexual life, the form (the narrative) reinforces the content (the image of the sexual act). In myths about sexual doubles, the two paradoxes converge and attempt to heal one another, as narrative and language themselves may emerge as substitutes for the lost object of love.²⁶ But they may, rather, tear the rift even farther apart, language tearing away at sexuality and sexuality at language.

The truth of sex inheres, in the most literally superficial level, in naked-

²⁵ François Flahaut, "Imagination and Mythology in Contemporary Literature (Tolkien, Lovecraft) and Science Fiction," in *Mythologies*, ed. Yves Bonnefoy and Wendy Doniger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 2:790.

²⁶ I am indebted to Mark Krupnick for this formulation.

ness: we see one another uncovered. But, as Nietzsche pointed out, nakedness is the best mask, and there are other sorts of truth, more cultural than natural, associated with sex, such as words cried out at the moment of passion, the moment of truth. Indeed, many traditions record the theme of what Sanskrit poetics calls the *namaskhalana* ("stumbling on the name"), the awkward situation that arises when a man calls out the name of one woman when he is making love to another woman. In this case, words betray the truth, while the physical act lies (in implying a monogamous love). The crying out in the act of love, a naked cry that may at first appear to be as primitive as speech-acts can be, is nevertheless a cultural fact; the inarticulate coital cries give way to the name, a culturally constructed entity.

Of course, speech is also an event; the telling of the story is itself an event, which requires to be told. Within the stories themselves, the speech-act recurs in opposition to the sexual act and the tongue as a sexual organ in opposition to the eye as a sexual organ. In Indian texts dating from ca. 800 B.C.E., the great phallic God, Indra, sends his grandson to seduce a demoness named "Long-tongue," to immobilize her through sexual intercourse so that Indra can kill her by piercing her with his phallic thunderbolt.²⁷ "Long-tongue"'s long tongue reappears as the lolling tongue of the deadly goddess Kali on many icons, a female phallus, but it is also the organ of language ("tongue," or *langue*, in the sense both of "part of the mouth" and of "language," as in "mother tongue"). So, too, the phallus itself, as Lacan tells us, is a word, a "tongue" in the other sense of the word. Indeed, one Sanskrit word for the penis is *linga*. (It would be wonderful if *linga* were related to the French *langue*, or to the Latin *lingua*, or even to the Spanish-American slang term, *lingo*, but I fear this cannot be.) Now, the primary meaning of *linga* (according to the standard Sanskrit dictionary of Sir Monier Monier-Williams) is "a mark, spot, sign, token, badge, emblem, characteristic"; it then means "any assumed or *false* badge or mark, guise, disguise." The idea that a sign is, ipso facto, a deception is worth noting. And *linga* also means "proof, evidence; . . . a sign of guilt, corpus delicti." But its narrower meaning of "the sign of gender or sex, organ of generation" is further narrowed to "the male organ or Phallus (esp. that of Siva)" or "the image of a god, an idol."²⁸ The sign of universal sexuality is linked with the sign of a particular god, Siva, in texts that argue that all human beings are naturally de-

²⁷ *Jaiminiya Brahmana*, ed. Raghu Vira and Lokesh Chandra, Sarasvati Vihara ser., vol. 31 (Nagpur, 1954), 1:90–91. See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Tales of Sex and Violence: Folklore, Sacrifice, and Danger in the Jaiminiya Brahmana* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 101–3.

²⁸ Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1899), s.v. *linga*.

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signed to be the worshipers of Siva and his wife Parvati; the clear proof of this is the fact that all men have the *linga*, and all women the *pinda* (the vagina, the image of Parvati).²⁹ Moreover, in logic, Monier-Williams continues, the *linga* is “the invariable mark which proves the existence of anything in an object” (as in the proposition “Where there is smoke, there is fire,” where smoke is the *linga*). And, finally, in grammar, *linga* means “gender.”³⁰ Thus the ancient Hindus recognized the primacy of sexuality in human life as the distinguishing sign, the physiological equivalent of the signs of grammar, evidence, deception, and, more significantly, divinity.

R. Howard Bloch, in *The Scandal of the Fabliaux*, notes that, among the many sexual tricks depicted in medieval French stories, the dirty story itself is the greatest trick of all. People use tricky speech to accomplish their sexual ends; the genitals and the tongue are conflated, and genitals (dismembered and animated) often literally tell tales. As Bloch remarks, “It is not the desiring body that generates the tale which merely reflects it, but the tale which produces desire and which can even be held responsible for the desire for narrative. . . . There can be no difference between the desire so often expressed in sexual terms on the level of the theme and the desire for the story itself.”³¹ In other words, these are not merely stories about sexual tricks; they are stories about stories. They use dirty sexual tricks to say something about the dirty and deceptive tricks of language. The central event is not necessarily the cuckolding but the clever words that the woman tells to conceal the cuckolding. And the excitement that we experience in hearing the story is an excitement about the language—the desire to hear the story—more than the desire for the sexual act described in the story.

The desire for narrative of which Bloch speaks owes a great deal to the writings of Roland Barthes, particularly to *S/Z*, which Mark Krupnick has called “the greatest of modern literary-critical exegeses of masquerade, Barthes’ *S/Z*, his virtuoso 200-plus pages on a 40-page story of Balzac called *Sarrasine*.”³² At the level of narrative, a young (naive) Frenchman named Sarrasine goes to Rome, where he falls in love with the great opera diva, La Zambinella, unaware that Italian opera “women” are actually castrati, and he is “castrated” (and killed) when he learns the truth. The story of Sarrasine is told by a would-be lover to a lady who asks for the

²⁹ *Skanda Purana* (Bombay, 1867), 8:18–19.

³⁰ Monier-Williams, s.v. *linga*.

³¹ R. Howard Bloch, *The Scandal of the Fabliaux* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 103, 109.

³² Mark Krupnick, personal communication, May 1992.

story ("I want to know now"), to which the storyteller replies, "You haven't yet given me the right to obey you when you say: 'I want to.'" Barthes's gloss of this reply is: "If you give yourself to me, I will tell you the story: tit for tat: a moment of love in exchange for a good story³³ . . . the truth in exchange for a night of love, a narrative in exchange for a body."³⁴ Thus the "desire for narrative" appears here as a contract that is the inverse of the contract of Scheherezade: the story is told by a man to a woman, and the story causes, rather than prevents, his "death" (castration).

Moreover, within the story that the lover tells the woman, sex and speech once again intermingle, this time in the seductive voice of the castrato. Sarrasine, the man in love with the castrato, remarks to him/her, "That angelic voice, that delicate voice would be an anomaly, coming from any body but yours." And Barthes comments: "If Sarrasine were reading what he says, he could no longer pretend his pleasure in the castrato was a mistake or a sublimation; he himself formulates the *truth*, the truth of the enigma, of La Zambinella, of himself. To the cultural code under which the castrato is a *counterfeit* of woman and the pleasure he can create an *anomaly*, Sarrasine replies that the union of the adorable voice and the castrated body is *right*."³⁵

Barthes has much more to say about the erotic, and deceptive, use of the voice: "An erotic substance, the Italian voice was produced *a contrario* (according to a strictly symbolic inversion) by singer without sex: this inversion is *logical*, . . . as though, by selective hypertrophy, sexual density were obliged to abandon the rest of the body and lodge in the throat, thereby draining the organism of all that *connects* it."³⁶ Thus the story plays upon the use of the voice, and of words, as an aphrodisiac: as we learn from Cyrano de Bergerac, as well as from everyday Irish blarney, the voice is a most potent sexual double. The tongue, in this context, is far dirtier than the genitals. This is upward displacement of the sort noted not by Freud but by Claude Lévi-Strauss, when he remarked on the ways in which men exchange women in the same way that they exchange words: "That the mediating factor, in this case, should be the *women of the group*, who are *circulated* between clans, lineages, or families, in place of the *words of the group*, which are *circulated* between individuals, does not at all change the fact that the essential aspect of the phenome-

³³ Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1974), p. 86; originally published in French as *S/Z* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

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non is identical in both cases.”³⁷ And the connection between language and sex was noted before Lévi-Strauss by Bronislaw Malinowski, in conversation with his Trobriand Islanders: “Mokadayu, of Okopukopu, was a famous singer. Like all of his profession, he was no less renowned for his success with ladies. ‘For,’ say the natives, ‘the throat is a long passage like the *wila* (vagina), and the two attract each other.’ ‘A man who has a beautiful voice will like women very much and they will like him.’ Many stories are told of how he slept with all the wives of the chief in Olivilevi, how he seduced this and that married woman.”³⁸ There is, therefore, an intimate connection between sexual masquerade and (artificial) language, more particularly the genres of opera and myth. The knowledge that the myth transmits is, in part, self-validating; it transmits the knowledge of its own truth. But these myths also deconstruct their own truth and tell us that language, in which myths are inscribed, is a lie. Thus they tell us about the deceptive nature of knowledge itself, both sexual knowledge and the fragile knowledge transmitted by language.

THE DECEPTIONS OF THEOLOGY

But the most important statement made by this corpus of myths concerns the deceptivity not of language but of God. For the linguistic and psychological issues addressed by these myths are framed by underlying, often implicit, theological issues. Many of the stories in which gods are the characters turn out to be largely about human problems. But, in contrast, many of the stories about human beings raise truly theological questions. After all, humans often ask theological questions, and gods are often all too human, as Nietzsche would have said. Both psychological and theological questions may be asked of the same myth. It is not the case that one can ask psychological questions only of “realistic” myths and theological questions only of “fantastic” myths.

Indeed, as Rank has pointed out, psychology and theology divide the turf of the soul, which he regards as the basis of the concept of the double, very neatly between them: “In the original duality of the soul concept, I am inclined to see the root of man’s two endeavors to preserve his self and to maintain the belief in its immortality: religion and psychology. From the belief in the soul of the dead in one form or another sprang all

³⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Language and the Analysis of Social Laws,” in his *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 61. See Dan Sperber’s penetrating critique of this formulation in “Claude Lévi-Strauss,” in *Structuralism and Since: From Lévi-Strauss to Derrida*, ed. John Sturrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 19–51, here p. 23.

³⁸ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 98.

religion; from the belief in the soul of the living, psychology eventually developed.”³⁹ But, as Rank points out, there is an essential difference between the assertions of ancient religion and modern psychological literature: where the ancient texts represent the Double as a symbol of eternal life, a way of escaping death, modern literature sees the Double as a symbol of death itself.⁴⁰ Death, doubling, and deception intersect throughout this corpus of myths: the gods trick mortals into accepting the substitute and, therefore, dying. They cheat Yama, and he dies.

The theological level of the mythology of sexual masquerades confronts such themes as a god who becomes incarnate as a man (masquerades as a man), often to get into a woman’s bed, or of God splitting into good and evil,⁴¹ or of God creating man in his image, as his double. It also involves the complex question of sacrificial doubles: the scapegoat who is beheaded instead of the sacrificer,⁴² the stone that takes the place of Zeus in the belly of Chronos (indeed, all the Greek myths of substitution and ruse),⁴³ the lamb that substitutes for Christ in the Eucharist. Throughout these myths, we would do well to ask of each particular story, What is the source of deception? The self? The partner? God? In India, as the myths of illusion (*maya*) teach us, it is indeed God. In Islam, the substitute mother (Hagar), regarded as the mother of the Arabs, poses another sort of problem; some have solved this dilemma by arguing that Sarah rather than Hagar was in fact the mother of the Arabs.

For a psychologist, the human concerns provide a logical and psychological warp on which the theological versions are woven, but for a theologian, the philosophical problem is the warp, the psychosexual problem the weft woven onto it. Thus sex may be a metaphor for god, but god may also be a metaphor for sex. The psychological and theological concerns of the myth stand as metaphors for one another, like the Escher drawing of the hand drawing the hand drawing the hand. They intersect at the point of abandonment: the terror of being abandoned, by the human agents, first the mother and then the wife, and then by god. The human experience of the abandoning mother or wife and the theological hypothesis of an abandoning god (otiose, *absconditus*, or Deist) reinforce one another. Two lovers make one, just as the child with the mother makes one, and

³⁹ Otto Rank, “The Double as Immortal Self,” in his *Beyond Psychology* (New York: Dover, 1958), pp. 62–101, here p. 74.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁴¹ See C. G. Jung, *Answer to Job*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London, 1954).

⁴² Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith, “Sacrifice and Substitution: Ritual Mystification and Mythical Demystification,” *Numen* 36, no. 2 (December 1989): 189–224.

⁴³ Nicole Loraux, “The Origins of Mankind in Greek Myths: Born to Die,” pp. 90–95, and Jean-Louis Durand, “Sacrifice in Greek Myths,” Durand, pp. 122–127, both in *Greek and Egyptian Mythologies*, comp. Yves Bonnefoy, trans. under the direction of Wendy Doniger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

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the loss of the lover and the loss of the mother preshadow the loss of the god who abandons humankind.

For the god or goddess in these myths is otiose, a layabout: like a policeman, she's never there when you need her. Or she is *absconditus*, hidden, vanished, like a criminal with the loot: when you need her, she is feasting with the Ethiopians or (like Baal in the contest with Elijah, in 1 Kings 18:27) temporarily indisposed: "And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, 'Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.'" "Pursuing" is the King James euphemism for the much more insulting suggestion of the Hebrew text: "shitting."⁴⁴

The abandoning mother behaves like God in the Deist argument: God made the world and then left it here for us, without him to run it, a watch with no watchmaker—and, the myth adds, leaving us to the mercies of the substitute. In India, the otiosity of god is also expressed through the erotic metaphor of *viraha*: the longing for a lover (often an adulterous lover) from whom one is separated. God is not with us, the poem says, because he is making love to some other woman instead; god (Krsna, for instance), doubles himself for his various women and comes to you with some other woman's lipstick on his collar (or the Hindu equivalent: the scars of her nails on his back). The hymns to Krsna, which praise *viraha* as the most intense relationship that one can have with the deity, share the attitude of the Blues: "How can I miss you when you never go away?"

If we view the human concerns as the logical and psychological base from which the theological versions were derived, we are following in the footsteps of the ancient school of interpretation that we call Euhemerism, which argued that all myths developed in this way: from a "rational" core of legend about human heroes there developed an "irrational" overlay about gods. And by attempting to unravel this unfortunate process, the Euhemerists rationalized the myths: that is, they took stories ostensibly about the gods and made them (back) into stories about humans. Freud may be regarded as a latter-day Euhemerist when he argues that stories that appear to be about god are really about your father. The interpretive process of rationalization (regarding the supernatural as derived from the natural) argues that the myth itself has *irrationalized*, turning what is rational (observable human behavior) into what is irrational (unobservable divine behavior). But we can also see the opposite process at work in our stories. That is, theological questions are posed: What is god like? How did the human race begin? And in order to answer these questions, human images, human concerns, are projected into the divine world.

⁴⁴ The Hebrew word, *siyn*, is treated more clearly, though still euphemistically, by the Jewish Publication Society of America: "he is gone aside."

The meanings of the myths, however, must be sought not merely in the superficial anthropomorphic forms and quasi-human events but in the darker questions that are posed. While irrationalization may indeed occur in mythology (ideas about men and women being transformed into myths about gods and goddesses), the opposite process (what I would call “rationalization”) is equally common and important, when ideas about gods and goddesses are translated into myths about men and women.

BODY AND SOUL

The myth of the double is an attempt to prove the existence of the soul. The religious implications of the double may be further realized when we ask, first, what is real and what unreal in each of these stories and, second, whether the shadow is death or life. Some myths of sexual masquerade assume that life is real, the body is real, and the shadow or the soul is an unreal intrusion into that reality. In this more secular view, the shadow represents death and is feared, or the shadow may stand for the natural imperfections that make an individual human endearing, the scars and signs of age on the body of someone that one *really* loves. Such texts assume that the body is more important than the soul, that the visible form (the body) is the person, and the invisible form (the soul) is not. Many of these myths argue that carnal knowledge is the only knowledge that we have, that all the essential moments of human life are remembered only in the body, not in the head, just as we remember how to tie shoes or play the piano.

But other texts assume that the body is unreal, at least in the Buddhist sense that it *will not last forever*; and posit an immortal soul that is real. In this second, more religious view, the shadow represents the eternal soul, the perfect ideal that the actual person never realizes, and is courted as a vehicle of immortality. Such myths say that the soul, not the body, is the person. And all the effort that is taken in setting up the masquerades that abound in these myths, the elaborate devices and ruses and tricks, implies that only *that* woman’s body, the body that one is not allowed to have, will do, rather than the body to which one has sexual rights.

The Rg Veda expresses both views at once, in speaking of the Creator: “His shadow is immortality—and death.”⁴⁵ Plato argued that we are all shadows, and many myths seem to express the idea that the human creature is god’s shadow; we may see this implied in the tale of Samjna. But many humanistic and atheistic books about religion, like Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* and Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, create myths that express the opposite idea: that god is our shadow. The basic tension is be-

⁴⁵ Rg Veda 10.121.2; O’Flaherty, *The Rig Veda* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 27.

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tween physical love, which is the same for all objects and subjects, all heads and bodies (all cats are gray), and romantic love, which singles out an individual person as the only one you can love, body and soul. But different cultures view this tension in different ways, and myths often express both sides of the paradox at once: this is the power of the ambiguity of myth.

We might also distinguish between traditional mythological forms of these stories, which emphasize those basic human moments, indeed almost animal moments, that are the same for all bodies, and the more romantic or literary versions, which emphasize the more cultural moments where the head does the remembering—the moments of personality, education, logic, and, above all, speech, when, like French structuralists, we identify ourselves with our heads. The conflict between nature and culture, love and duty, that provides the tension in these stories reinforces the opposition between romantic and traditional views of love. In fact, we might distinguish between three separate forces operating in these stories: romantic (“One person is everything to me”), traditional (“I have one person for sex and another for something else”), and biological (male: “I need to put my sperm in lots and lots of places”; female: “I need a male to stay and protect my young”).

And a myth can subvert one pole of any of these oppositions for the other, temporarily or permanently. Thus, in the courtly literature of various cultures (such as medieval Bengal, Europe, and Japan), the anti-code becomes the code; adultery is endorsed, but so is marriage, often in the same myth. So, too, in the mystic traditions, social disorder (adultery) often leads to the disclosure of the sacred, but ultimately, as Max Weber demonstrated, these charismatic figures and moments are routinized in order to survive in society. Both the central ideal and the subversive ideal are expressed in the same story. Sometimes the story may begin with subversion but end by capitulating to the traditional paradigm; sometimes the reverse. The myth, like the interpreter, walks a tightrope.

Most myths assume that one can assume the body of someone else in a masquerade without assuming the soul contained in that body. In certain versions of the Ramayana, it is said that Ravana cannot take the form of Rama in order to seduce Sita because if he did so he would get Rama’s memory traces along with his form, and so he would stop being Ravana: “Someone said to Ravana, ‘You are taking various magic forms in order to get Sita. Why don’t you take the form of Rama sometime and then approach Sita?’ Ravana said, ‘When I think of Rama, how can I think of such a common thing as another man’s wife! And so how can I take the form of Rama?’”⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Srisriramakrsnakathamrta 1.181.

In a way, the emphasis on the physical identity of doubles is an argument *against* the visual: it demonstrates that we are wrong to judge by appearances. When two people look alike, we are forced to distinguish between them by searching for more subtle, more profound, signs of identity. Thus, in more traditional versions of the myth of sexual doubles, such as the tale of the wife of the Sun and her shadow, all that binds the doubles together is their appearance; everything else—feelings, personality, voice—is different. But in the variants of the myth of sexual masquerade where the wife masquerades as the harlot (the tale of Tamar, for instance), the person really *is* the same, but looks different. These are more than two variants on a theme; they are two very different approaches to the problem of human identity—and divine identity.



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Author(s): Wendy Doniger

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Wendy Doniger

SITA AND HELEN,
AHALYA AND
ALCMENA:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

In this article, I intend to discuss the duality, the two-ness, of two sets of two women in two bodies of mythology, one from ancient India and one from ancient Greece (supplemented, in the latter case, with later European variations on the Greek theme). And I intend to make two basic points about them: first, what they have in common, and second, how they differ. The first point, the similarity, must be established before we can go on to the second, the difference; we must acknowledge that there is something to compare before we can compare it. And the similarity must be explained in one way (in terms of shared cultural assumptions, at the very least, and perhaps even more broadly shared human assumptions), the differences in other ways (in terms of the influence of different cultural factors). First I will compare the shadow Sita and the phantom Helen, then the Hindu Ahalya (seduced by the god Indra in the form of her husband) and the Greek Alcmene (seduced by Zeus in the form of her husband), and then all four.

THE SHADOW SITA

Let us begin with Sita, the heroine of the *Ramayana*. The earliest recorded version of her story, in the Sanskrit text of Valmiki (ca. 200 B.C.E.–200 C.E.), establishes this basic plot:

Sita, the wife of Prince Rama, had been born from a furrow of the earth. The demon king, Ravana, stole Sita from Rama and kept her captive on the island of Lanka for many years. When Rama finally killed Ravana and brought Sita back

home with him, both he and his people feared that her reputation, if not her chastity, had been sullied by her long sojourn in the house of another man. Rama forced her to undergo an ordeal by fire, which she survived. He reinstated her, but when, later, he doubted her again, she disappeared forever back into the earth.¹

Ravana never actually rapes Sita or, indeed, touches her at all. Another episode in Valmiki's *Ramayana* (the latest part, probably a section of afterthoughts) tell us why he does not rape Sita when he has her in his power:

One day Ravana was full of passion; he saw the celestial nymph Rambha and was crazy to have her. She reminded him that she was his daughter-in-law, more precisely the wife of the son of his brother Vaishravana. But Ravana replied, "You say you are my daughter in law. For those who have but one husband, this argument is valid, but in the world of the gods, the gods have established a law that is said to be eternal, that celestial nymphs have no appointed consorts, nor are the gods monogamous." Then he ravished her. She ran home and told her husband, Nalakubara, who said, "Since, despite your lack of love for him, he ravished you brutally, he will never be able to approach another young woman unless she shares his love; if, carried away by lust, he does violence to any woman who does not love him, his head will split into seven pieces." When Ravana learned of the curse, his hair stood on end and he ceased to indulge in uniting himself with those who had no affection for him. And the chaste married women whom he had raped rejoiced when they heard this curse.²

And that's why Ravana never touched Sita.

Elsewhere in the same book of the *Ramayana*, Ravana gets a more specific curse for lusting not for a nymph but for a good woman named Vedavati; when she resists him, he warns her that she will soon lose her youth, but she insists that she wants to marry Vishnu; infuriated, Ravana seizes her by the hair, which she cuts off with her hand that has become a sword; she throws herself into the fire and promises to be reborn for his destruction. And she is reborn as Sita.³ Earlier, Ravana has referred to this incident, saying, "I was cursed by Vedavati when I raped her before; she has been reborn as Sita; and what was predicted by Rambha, Uma, and Punjikasthala has now come to pass."⁴ Here Sita is said to be, herself, the reincarnation of the woman whom Ravana had raped, now called not Rambha but Vedavati, who was not actually raped at all. This text

¹ *Ramayana* of Valmiki, critical ed. (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960–75), 6.103–6; Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Dreams, Illusion, and Other Realities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 92.

² *Ramayana* 7.26.8–47, plus the verse excised from the Baroda edition after verse 47.

³ *Ibid.*, 7.17.1–31.

⁴ *Ibid.*, lines 6–10 excised after 6.48.7.

sexualizes Sita by giving her a sexual past (as a woman accosted, but not raped, by Ravana) and then limits that sexuality by attributing to that woman the very powers that Sita herself has: the power of the text, the power of the author's knowledge that she must not be touched. One later text spells out this power:

A beautiful maiden named Vedavati was promised that she would marry Vishnu in her next life. She went into the mountains to meditate, but Ravana came to her, grabbed her with his hand, and attempted to rape her. She, being a good woman, paralyzed him with her angry gaze; he became impotent [*jada*] in his hands and feet, and unable to say anything. Then, by the power of her yoga, she died and was reborn as Sita.⁵

But, though other texts—*Mahabharata*, *Harivamsha*, *Vishnu Purana*, and other Puranas—omit the ordeal of Sita,⁶ the fifteenth-century *Adhyatmaramayana* found it necessary to exculpate Sita even from being present in Ravana's home. Indeed, it even exculpates her from the weakness, described in the Valmiki text, of asking Rama to capture a golden deer for her, a deer who turns out to be an illusion created by the demons precisely in order to lure Rama away so that Ravana can capture Sita. This illusory deer may have inspired the *Adhyatmaramayana* to create the illusory Sita:

Rama, knowing what Ravana intended to do, told Sita, "Ravana will come to you disguised as an ascetic; put a shadow of yourself outside the hut, and stay inside the hut yourself. Live inside fire, invisible, for a year; when I have killed Ravana, come back to me as you were before." Sita obeyed; she placed an illusory Sita [*mayasita*] outside and entered the fire. This illusory Sita saw the illusory deer and urged Rama to capture it for her.⁷

Rama then pretends to grieve for Sita, pretends to fight to get her back, and lies to his brother Lakshmana, who genuinely grieves for Sita. Sita herself is never subjected to an ordeal at all: the shadow simply voluntarily enters the fire and vanishes forever, while the real Sita emerges and remains with Rama. But Rama seems to forget what he has done; he orders the illusory Sita into the fire as if she were real, and only when the gods come and remind him of his divinity (as they do in the Valmiki text) does Fire return Sita to Rama, remarking, "You made this illusory

⁵ *Brahmavaivarta Purana*, Anandasrama Sanskrit Series no. 102 (Poona, 1935), 2.14.1–59.

⁶ Frank Whaling, *The Rise of the Religious Significance of Rama* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980), p. 138.

⁷ *Adhyatmaramayana* 3.7.1–10, trans. Rai Bahadur Nala Baij Nath, in *The Sacred Books of the Hindus* (Allahabad: The Panini Office, Bahadurganj, 1913).

Sita in order to destroy Ravana. Now he is dead, and that Sita has disappeared.”⁸

Tulsi Das’s sixteenth-century Hindi version, the *Holy Lake of the Acts of Rama*, expands upon this motif:

[Rama said to Sita] “Hearken, beloved wife, faithful, beautiful and virtuous; I am about to play an engaging game as man; do you then make your abode in fire till I have extirpated the demons.” As soon as Rama had made an end of speaking, Sita laid her lord’s feet upon her heart and entered into the fire. She left her image there, of just the same form and modest disposition as her own. Not even [Rama’s brother] Laksman knew the secret of what the Blessed Lord had done. [Ravana stole Sita, and Rama got her back and a great celebration took place.] Now, before this Rama had caused Sita to enter the fire, and now he who witnesses the secrets of all hearts desired to make her manifest again. For this reason, the Lord of all compassion issued a somewhat harsh command, whereat the female demons all began to grieve. [That is, he commanded Sita to undergo the fire ordeal.] . . . When [Sita] the princess of Videha saw the fiercely burning flames, she was glad at heart, and felt no fear. “If in my heart,” she said, “in thought and word and deed I have never left [Rama] and turned to another, then, O Fire, who knowest the thoughts of all, be thou to me as cooling sandal-wood!” . . . Her shadow and the stain of public shame were burnt up in the blazing fire. None understood the action of the Lord; in the heavens the gods, adepts and sages stood at gaze. Then Fire in bodily form took the hand of the true Sita, famed in the scriptures and the world, and brought her and committed her to Rama’s care.⁹

This episode simultaneously justifies Rama’s “somewhat harsh command” in subjecting Sita to the ordeal (by pointing out that he knew it was not the real Sita all along) and quells the uneasiness that the reader (or hearer) may well share with Rama at the thought of Sita living in Ravana’s house for so long (the “public shame” that is burnt up in the fire). Tulsi argues that Rama never intended, or needed, to test Sita (since he knew she was not in Ravana’s house at all), but has “her” enter the fire merely in order to bring the real Sita back from the fire, to make her visible again. The idea of the shadow Sita may also express sympathy for Sita and therefore protect her from the trauma of life with Ravana. Significantly, it is Rama, not Sita, who has the idea, and the power, to create her double.

But in borrowing this motif from the *Adhyatmaramayana*, Tulsi chose not to follow through on its full implications; in a sense, Tulsi’s double lacks reality, or, to put it differently, the real Sita never loses her reality.

⁸ Ibid., 6.8.21.

⁹ Tulsi Das, *Ramacaritamansa*, translated by W. D. P. Hill as *The Holy Lake of the Acts of Rama* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), D 23–24, 107–8.

Probably in order to maintain the power of the narrative, Tulsi has his Rama apparently forget about the shadow at crucial moments and genuinely grieve for Sita as if the real Sita had in fact been stolen by Rama. Moreover, as Frank Whaling points out, "Sita is very much a woman of flesh and blood in her interviews with Ravana and Hanumant. Tulsi seems to have forgotten the shadow Sita as soon as he has introduced her."¹⁰

But the double is real enough to be the object of sympathy; like Rama and Sita, she suffers. She is "a counterfeit or surrogate Sita, condemned to undergo the trials of Lanka—including the painful immersion in fire at the end of the *Ramayana* war—without ever winning the reward of suffering in the form of union with Rama."¹¹ Thus the double created in order to spare the original from suffering becomes a new original, who suffers even more than the original because she cannot have what the original was saved *for*.

In some texts, the shadow goes on to have a life of her own:

One day when Sita and Rama were in the forest, the god of Fire came to Rama, took the true Sita, and left a shadow Sita with Rama; Fire constructed an illusory Sita, with qualities, form, and limbs equal to hers, and gave her to Rama. He told Rama not to divulge the secret to anyone; even Rama's brother Lakshmana did not know. Eventually, Rama subjected Sita to the ordeal of fire and Fire restored the real Sita to Rama.

But then the shadow Sita asked Rama and Fire, "What shall I do?" Fire told her to go to the Pushkara shrine, and there she generated inner heat and was reborn as Draupadi. In the Golden Age she is called Vedavati; in the Second Age (the Treta), she is Sita. And in the Third Age (the Dvapara), the shadow is Draupadi. This shadow, who was in the prime of her youth, was so nervous and excited with lust when she asked Shiva for a husband that she repeated her request five times. And so she obtained five husbands, the five Pandavas.¹²

Here it is Fire, not Rama, who constructs the double; Rama has lost some of his agency. And it is Fire, not Rama, who gives the shadow Sita a sexual future; for when she has saved Sita from contact with Ravana, she goes on to have a life of her own, reborn as Draupadi, heroine of the other epic, the *Mahabharata*, and of many contemporary cults—a woman with five husbands, unheard of in polygynous, but never polyandrous, Hinduism. In the past, Sita herself (as Vedavati) was the victim of a promiscuous man, and in the future her shadow (as Draupadi) will be accused of promiscuity. In the present, she is split between the chaste Sita who must

¹⁰ Whaling, p. 248.

¹¹ David Shulman, "On Being a Stone: A Reading of the Tirupati *Purana*" (Jerusalem: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1990), ms. 13.

¹² *Brahmavaivarta Purana* 2.14.1–59.

be protected and the (presumably unchaste) shadow who undergoes Sita's ordeal not only with Ravana but with Rama.

A contemporary Tamil text attempts not only to save Sita (by using the surrogate) but to reward the double with a sexually satisfying future incarnation that is not, however, promiscuous:

Once Ravana had behaved in an unseemly manner toward a virtuous woman named Vedavati. She became angry and cursed him saying, "I will destroy your entire clan," and then she sought refuge with Lord Agni. Lord Agni consoled her and offered her protection. [When Ravana came to abduct Sita,] Lord Agni transformed Vedavati, who was in his care, into the likeness of Sita and carried away the real Sita, leaving Vedavati in her place. After Lord Rama had defeated Ravana and recovered Sita he was unable to bear the rumors of scandal, and so he commanded Sita, who in reality was Vedavati, to undergo trial by fire. Vedavati entered the fire as Lord Rama ordered, and at that moment Lord Agni appeared with Vedavati and the real Sita, who had been living under his protection. When he saw two identical Sitas, Lord Rama was astonished. The real Sita said, "My Lord, this woman's name is Vedavati. . . . She went with Ravana in my place and suffered unbearable hardships in Lanka. You must marry this woman who suffered so much in the Ashoka grove on our behalf." Rama answered, "O queen, you are undoubtedly aware that I have vowed that in my present incarnation as Rama I will have just one wife. But during the Kali Yuga I will assume the form of Venkateshwara. At that time this Vedavati will be born as Padmavati, daughter of Akasha Raja, and I will marry her."¹³

Vedavati now is reborn not as Sita but as Sita's shadow. Again Fire, rather than Rama, is the agent, and this time Rama is so far from masterminding the double that he does not understand what has happened at all. Now, unlike Rama in the Sanskrit texts we have just seen, Rama confronts the two doubles together. And now Sita does not merely use the surrogate to protect herself but protects the surrogate, assuming that the surrogate's sensibilities are like her own and that she, too, has rights. Generously she suggests that Rama marry them both. Rama prefers, however, to postpone this marriage to yet another incarnation, in the future. Vedavati is then reborn not as Draupadi but as Padmavati, an important Tirupati figure; thus the double takes on a persona and a rebirth, a (double) life of her own in South India, where she is said in some sources to have been set free by the god Vishnu after his wedding to her; "it, or she, roams the world still as an autonomized fragment of his divinity."¹⁴ One can imagine these texts continuing to proliferate in an infinite *mise en*

¹³ Ne. Ci. Teyvacikamani, *Sri Venkateca Makatmiyam*, trans. Norman Cutler (Chicago, 1996).

¹⁴ Shulman, "On Being a Stone," p. 13, citing I. Munucaminayutu, *Tiruppatti: Tirumalai yattirai* . . . (Cittur, 1928), p. 22.

abîme, caused by the suspension of the original assumption that the double is not real, does not count, has no feelings: once that is gone, each double creates a double, just as the original did.

Why did the authors of these later texts feel that they had to give the real Sita a double—indeed, more and more doubles? Perhaps because Rama became a god, and people who had been bothered for a long time about his treatment of Sita even when he was just a man could not allow their god to treat his woman so badly. Moreover, attitudes to women changed, too, and the growing Hindu obsession with the chastity of women reached a particularly fanatical climax after the Muslim invasions, the time in which the Hindi and Tamil texts were composed. The need to protect Sita's chastity from demons (read: Hindu women's chastity from Muslims) was answered by the appropriation of the motif of the surrogate, which was, as we shall soon see, already available in the literature.

The idea of creating an illusory Sita may indicate that the original Sita was very real indeed or that there was a perceived need to reject the reality of the original Sita. If an illusory Sita substitutes for a Sita who is originally illusory herself, the Sita who is captured is a double illusion, *maya* squared—or, if two negatives cancel one another out, a reality. There were ways of protecting Sita without creating a magical double, as both Kampan's Tamil *Ramayana* and the Tibetan *Ramayana* demonstrate, by devising other stratagems.¹⁵ The double Sita was the preferred device, however, because of its deep resonance with other aspects of the *Ramayana*. For there are many illusory Sitas, shadow Sitas, even in Valmiki's Sanskrit text. The demon Indrajit, son of Ravana, produces a false image of Sita and uses it to fool Rama.¹⁶ A golden image of Sita appears at the end of the *Ramayana*, after Sita's final disappearance: "Rama never sought another consort, but in every sacrifice a golden image of Sita took the place of the wife."¹⁷ There are also double Ravana's: in order to seduce Sita, he takes the form not of Rama but of an ascetic, and *Sita is fooled*.¹⁸ She succumbs not to his sexual temptations but simply to the belief that he is not Ravana but a Brahmin, yet this is enough to make her vulnerable to him, to draw her out of the charmed circle of Rama's protection. She has already been fooled by a demon (in the form of the golden deer) who mimicked Rama's voice, and she ignored Lakshmana's wise warning that it was merely a demonic imitation.¹⁹

¹⁵ See Camille J. Bulcke, *Ram-Katha: Utpatti aur Vikas* (Allahabad: Hindi Parisad Vaidyala, 1950), p. 345, as cited by Whaling, p. 126.

¹⁶ *Ramayana* 6.68.1–23.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.89.4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.44.31–33.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.42.14, 3.43.1–10.

The complex doublings of Sita grow in part out of the doctrine of illusion that is woven throughout all *Ramayanas*.²⁰ But they are also inspired by a very deep ambiguity in the attitude to Sita herself. On the one hand, she is the epitome of female chastity. On the other hand, as the *Ramayana* came to play a major role in political rhetoric in later Indian history, Sita began to look too good to be true—or too good to be good. Thus, according to one Dravidian reinterpretation: “Sita . . . is Ravana’s paramour who did not resist but ‘clung like a vine’ when she was abducted.”²¹ Whether Sita struggled or clung has become, like many other points in this epic, a matter for bitter, even violent dispute. We will return to this question of struggling versus clinging in the reception of the texts about Ahalya and Alcmena.

THE PHANTOM HELEN

Let us leave ancient India now, for a little while, and turn to ancient Greece, and Helen.

A close narrative parallel to the shadow Sita is provided by the story of Helen of Troy and her phantom double. But there is one essential difference between the two stories: where Sita was innocent, Helen is guilty of the sexual betrayal of which she is accused: Homer tells us, in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, that she fell for the Trojan Paris and ran off with him, leaving her Greek husband, King Menelaus, and thereby triggering the Trojan War, ostensibly fought to bring her back to Greece. (Marlowe put his finger on Helen’s importance when he wrote of her, “Was this the face that launch’d a thousand ships / And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?”)²² In Homer, there is no talk of another Helen taking her place in Troy. Yet Homer may well have known about the phantom Helen, for the theme is pre-Homeric, on the evidence of related texts, such as the story in the *Rig Veda* (ca. 1000 B.C.) about the goddess Saranyu, who left a double in her place when she abandoned her husband, the sun.²³ Helen is like Saranyu not only in having (in post-Homeric texts) a shadow double (called an *eidolon* in Greek, a ghost or shadow or image) but in her relationship with the Dioscuri or Gemini, the half-

²⁰ O’Flaherty, *Dreams, Illusion, and Other Realities* (n. 1 above), pp. 92–97.

²¹ Lloyd Rudolph, “Urban Life and Populist Radicalism: Dravidian Politics in Madras,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 20, no. 3 (May 1961): 288.

²² Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, scene 14.

²³ See Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 172–84; and Wendy Doniger, “Sexual Masquerades in Hindu Myths: Aspects of the Transmission of Knowledge in Ancient India,” in *The Transmission of Knowledge in South Asia*, ed. Nigel Crook (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 28–48, and “Saranyu/Samjna: The Sun and the Shadow,” in *Devi: Goddesses of India*, ed. John Stratton Hawley and Donna Wulff (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 154–72.

equine twins who are the Greek counterpart to the Ashvins, Saranyu's twin sons, and who are Helen's brothers. The equine imagery of Helen is maintained in a key Homeric episode in which Helen tempts the men trapped inside the Trojan horse, the horse pregnant with death for the Trojans, and almost succeeds in betraying the Greeks inside it, her countrymen, by impersonating the voices of their wives (*Iliad* 4.273)—doubling, aurally, as their wives.

Otto Skutsch, apologetically reviving the solar mythology of Max Müller, remarks that it "can hardly be an accident that [Saranyu] the woman associated with the Asvins was replaced by an *eidolon* just as [Helen] the sister of the Dioscuri was."²⁴ In support of this contention, he remarks that the identity of Saranyu and Helen was first suspected by Sanskritists in the last century;²⁵ so, too, Sita was compared to Helen by A. H. Krappe in 1931²⁶ and by Cristiano Grottanelli in 1982²⁷—but on grounds other than their doubling. M. L. West suggested that Helen went away to the south (Egypt) like the sun, and that she is solar in other ways, as well;²⁸ one late and rather dubious Greek source even asserts that Helen's father was not Zeus but the Sun.²⁹ Helen's name may even be related to Saranyu (through the Sanskrit *sarana*, "swift"). If this is so, then the ancient story of a shadow double—the story of the goddess Saranyu—may have inspired, or at least been available to, authors of the texts about both Sita and Helen.

But Helen, even in Homer, is duplicitous in the basic sexual sense of the word: she has two men, her husband and her lover. Indeed, she has two lovers; when Paris dies, she replaces him with Deiphobus. The multiplicity of Helen inspired Arthur Adkins to quip that there is only one precise measure in Greek philology, and that is the milli-helen, the precise quantity of energy it takes to launch a ship.³⁰ Helen also has two fathers—Zeus and Tyndareus, and two mothers—Leda and Nemesis. Thus, "Doubleness is the distinguishing mark of her entire tradition."³¹ Moreover, Helen is both doubling and doubled, both mimicked and mimicker.

²⁴ Otto Skutsch, "Helen: Her Name and Nature," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 102 (1987): 188–93, esp. 189.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 189, citing J. Ehni in 1890 and V. Pisani in 1928.

²⁶ A. H. Krappe, "Lancelot et Guenièvre," in *Revue celtique* 48 (1931): 92–123.

²⁷ Cristiano Grottanelli, "The King's Grace and the Helpless Woman: A Comparative Study of the Stories of Ruth, Charila, Sita," *History of Religions* 22, no. 1 (1982): 1–24.

²⁸ M. L. West, "Immortal Helen" (inaugural lecture at Bedford College, London, 1975), cited by Skutsch, p. 189.

²⁹ Ptolemy Chennos, preserved in Ptoleios's *Bibliothèque* 149a; Skutsch, p. 189.

³⁰ Cited by Matthew Adkins at the memorial service for Arthur Adkins, Rockefeller Memorial Chapel, the University of Chicago, March 13, 1996.

³¹ Norman Austin, *Helen of Troy and Her Shameless Phantom* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 115, citing Ann Bergren, p. 19.

Homer seems to assume that the real Helen went to Troy with Paris, leaving Menelaus with no wife at all. Aeschylus, however, in the *Agamemnon*, speaks of Menelaus as having a kind of shadow Helen while the real Helen was, presumably, in Troy (as she is in Homer's telling):

Through yearning for the one gone over the sea,
a ghost will seem to rule the house . . .
Fancies haunt him in dreams persuasively;
theirs is a grace without substance.
Unsubstantial it is, when one sees,
and dreaming reaches to the touch,
and the phantom is gone,
quickly slipping though his hands,
as it follows the winged paths of sleep.³²

Other traditions, from Homer on, assumed that Menelaus was left with no wife at all when Paris took her away. But where was she?

Herodotus maintained that the real Helen was not in Troy. She had run off with Paris, but a storm had cast them ashore in Egypt; she was kept there, protected by Proteus, while Paris returned home empty-handed; when the Greeks captured the walls, "There was no Helen!" And he reasons, "If Helen had been in Ilium, she would have been given back to the Greeks, whether Alexander wanted it so or not."³³ Herodotus accuses Homer of knowingly suppressing the story of Helen's absence from Troy. But Herodotus says nothing about a false Helen; the whole point of his story is that there was *no* Helen in Troy, that the entire Trojan War was fought in vain, for a woman who was not even *there*. Nor does Herodotus save the real Helen from being seduced by Paris; Proteus takes Helen only after the lovers have presumably consummated their adultery (though Herodotus remarks, ambiguously, that Helen was brought back from Egypt "unharm[ed] [*apathea kakon*]").³⁴ Elsewhere, Herodotus says that the Persians said that Helen (like other women) *willingly* ran off with Paris: "Clearly, the women would not have been carried off had they no mind to be."³⁵

The phantom Helen, who absolves the real Helen of adultery, is first mentioned in a palinode by Stesichorus, a text lost to us except for its citations by Plato, who cites three verses in the *Phaedrus* (243a): "When

³² Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* lines 416–24; in *The Oresteia*, trans. David Grene and Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

³³ Herodotus, *History*, trans. David Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). 2.112–20.

³⁴ Herodotus 1.119.

³⁵ Herodotus 1.4.

he was struck blind for accusing Helen, Stesichorus, unlike Homer, recognized the cause, for he was well educated, and immediately he composed his Palinode: 'The story [*logos*] is not true. You did not board the well-benched ships. You did not reach the towers of Troy.' This text agrees with Herodotus in asserting that Helen was absent from Troy. It compares the blindness of Stesichorus and Homer, implying that Homer remained blind because he thought the real Helen went to Troy—or worse, according to Herodotus, knew the real story and suppressed it. But where Herodotus got Helen as far as Egypt with Paris, Stesichorus kept her at home, presumably in Sparta. And from another passage in Plato we learn that Stesichorus also gave Helen a phantom stand-in at Troy: "Stesichorus says the phantom of Helen was fought for at Troy through ignorance of the truth."³⁶ Thus Paris was fooled, while, presumably, the real Helen stayed home safe at Sparta, and Menelaus was never fooled. Greek honor is saved.

But is the problem really solved? Norman Austin thinks not: "The Palinode's project, to remove the dishonor from the traditional story by ascribing all Helen's ambiguity to her simulacrum, far from resolving Helen's ambivalences, had the unwitting effect of making Helen into a ghost of her own ghost, the negative of a negative. . . . The only reason for this Helen's being was to be not-Helen of Troy."³⁷ Or, in Froma Zeitlin's words, "As fiction *eidolon*, Stesichorus' Helen acquires the capacity to impersonate herself."³⁸ Indeed, Stesichorus may have told his story not primarily to let Helen off the hook (she was, after all, one of the most famous whores of antiquity) but, rather, to extend Herodotus's cynical point about war: now Helen is not merely absent from Troy, but absent from the adulterous bed that was the excuse for the war. As Austin points out, "Only one question, in the end, held any force: Was Helen ever in another man's bed who was not her husband? Sparta, Egypt, Troy—who cared about the place? The question was not *where* but *whether*."³⁹

Euripides's play, *Helen*, reconciled the assertions of Herodotus (that Helen was not at Troy, but in Egypt) and Stesichorus (that Helen was not at Troy, but in Sparta, while her phantom was at Troy), by adding two essential details: the phantom replaced Helen in Sparta and was taken to Troy, so that the real Helen not only never reached Egypt with Paris, as Herodotus had said, but also never even slept with Paris; she was

³⁶ Plato, *Republic* 586 C [2.365 C]; cf. *Republic* 598 B 6 ff.

³⁷ Austin, p. 10.

³⁸ Froma Zeitlin, "Travesties of Gender and Genre in Aristophanes' *Thermophoriazusae*," in *Representations of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Helene Foley (New York and London: Gordon & Breach, 1981), pp. 169–217, esp. p. 202.

³⁹ Austin, p. 99.

magically transported from Sparta to Egypt. No longer is she, as in Homer and Herodotus, the willing adulteress; she would have been carried off against her will, it is implied (though never actually stated. . .), and the phantom was created to save her from an alliance she did not want. Menelaus had captured the phantom at Troy and lived with it in a cave for seven years (never noticing the difference); then he came to Egypt and met the real Helen. At that moment, the gods dissolved the phantom back into mist; Helen announced that the “evil thing” that was sent to Troy in her place, the piece of cloud, had been returned to the Ether (*Helen*, lines 1218–19).⁴⁰ Austin puts the point well: “The *eidolon* has played its part to perfection, as a most subtle *deus ex machina*, floating in and out of the play to resolve the complications.”⁴¹ Thus, as Helen herself claims at the start of the play, she never committed adultery:

Hera gave Paris not me, but a breathing image [*eidolon*] made in likeness to me, made out of air, and he thinks he has me, but has a useless seeming. Hermes caught me up in folds of air, veiled by cloud, and set me down in the halls of Proteus . . . and I will still make my home in Sparta with my husband, and he will know I never went to Troy, never spread a bed for any man (*Helen*, lines 31–67).

Later, Helen tells Menelaus that Hera made her image out of air so that Paris would not have her and that he, Menelaus, had had in the cave a bed worked by the gods (*Helen*, lines 582–88). Menelaus has already told us how he seized Helen from Troy and hid “the woman” in the depths of a cave (*Helen*, line 425), a phrase reminiscent simultaneously of the over-sexed women who lurk in hollow caves throughout the *Odyssey* (Calypso at 1.15, Scylla at 12.82) and of the shadow images in Plato’s caves.

Austin finds this trick hard to take:

At the risk of being thought ungracious, we might question the motives for such bed making, which leaves Menelaus with a cloud for his bedmate in order to punish Paris. . . . He may have mistakenly fought at Troy for a phantom—the woman-as-name—since he did not see her but only assumed she was in Troy. But to ask him to believe that for the past seven years he has enjoyed not Helen’s body but her name is to impose on him an ontology too steep for his comprehension.⁴²

Indeed, Menelaus is, understandably, confused. He admits that he was “tricked by the gods” when he held in his arms “a miserable piece of cloud” (*Helen*, line 703). He “recognizes that he has been sleeping with

⁴⁰ Euripides, *Helen*, Loeb Library, with an English translation by Arthur S. Way (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966).

⁴¹ Austin, p. 167.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 162.

but a name, compounded of conceits and lies.”⁴³ In this episode, as in Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon*, Menelaus, rather than Paris, is the one who is fooled by the phantom. When he sees Helen he says things like “I never saw a more resembling form” and “I see you as most like Helen, my lady.” But when she remarks on his astonishing resemblance to Menelaus and welcomes him back, “after such a long time, to the arms of your wife,” Menelaus shies away and tells her to take her hands off him. He insists that he has only one wife, “the one hidden in the cave,” though he admits that Helen’s body is very much like hers (which is not surprising since Helen has apparently not aged a day since she left Sparta [*Helen*, line 161]). Menelaus is finally convinced only when one of the doubles vanishes back into the ether from which it came (assuming that the one frail enough to vanish was the false one): a messenger comes and says that, just now, his “wife” vanished from the secret cave, declaring that she was nothing but a phantom, an empty *eidolon*, and saying, “You thought Paris had Helen, but he never did. The daughter of Tyndareus did nothing, though evil things are said of her.” Only then does Menelaus say, “The stories [*logoi*] told by this woman fit, and are true” (*Helen*, line 622)—which is, together with Helen’s insistence that “I never went to the land of Troy” (*Helen*, line 575), an almost verbatim repetition of Stesichorus’s recantation: “The story [*logos*] is not true. You did not go to Troy.”

In Euripides’ *Helen*, as in all Greek tragedies, the parts of women were played by men. In Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazousae*, the men play the women’s parts in the play within the play; Euripides persuades his kinsman Mnesilochos to dress in women’s clothes in order to spy on the women who are plotting against him; but Mnesilochos is discovered and offers, then, to play Helen in Euripides’ play, while Euripides himself plays Menelaus. But when the two speak a number of lines from Euripides’ play, they are interrupted by comic remarks from other characters who refuse to accept the stage convention that the actors are people other than their real identities. Thus where, in the Euripides play, the joke was that that there were two Helens with one name, here the joke is in the flat-footed refusal to let one actor play two parts (his real-life identity and the character in the play). As Zeitlin puts it: “The *eidolon* of Helen is neither visible nor even mentioned in the parody. Nevertheless, as the personification of illusion itself, the phantom figure hovers over the entire scene.”⁴⁴ Indeed, the illusion of Helen continued to hover over Western literature; Helen in Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus* and Goethe’s *Faust* is a different sort of ghost, the phantom of all losses, the phantom of beauty and perfection.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 165.

⁴⁴ Zeitlin, pp. 394, 408.

SITA AND HELEN

Let us now consider the reasons why the same story should have been constructed and applied to the hated whore of ancient Greece and the revered chaste wife of ancient India; in essence, these two traditions tell the same story about two diametrically opposed women. Was Freud right about the inevitable connection between the whore and the madonna? Let us consider the ways in which the two women, and the two stories, are similar and different.

Both Sita and Helen are the subjects of a series of texts which find it necessary to deny their presence at the scene of the sexual crime. Both Hindu and Greek traditions resorted to the story of the surrogate double to generate a revisionist history of a central episode, a rape, in the Epic, but for very different reasons. For when we look closer, we see that the two traditions tell “the same story” so differently that it is only in the most brutal, basic structures of the plot that they continue to resemble one another. Sita is innocent of any lust, merely the victim of Ravana’s lust; Helen is less seduced against than seducing. Sita never does sleep with Ravana, in any ancient South Asian text that I know; Helen certainly does sleep with Paris in Homer, if not in some later texts. Sita proves her chastity and, in some texts, vanishes forever, leaving Rama miserable (and, one hopes, very sorry that he behaved so badly); Helen acknowledges her promiscuity and lives with Menelaus until, presumably, old age; we meet them in their uneasy domesticity, long after the Trojan War, in the *Odyssey* (4.121). Helen, though the daughter of a god (Zeus), is not a goddess; Sita, though technically parentless (she sprang out of a furrow), becomes a goddess by the time of Tulsi and behaves very much like one even in Valmiki’s text.⁴⁵ Sita is fooled by Ravana and fooled by the demons who mimic Rama’s voice; Helen fools others and successfully mimics the voices of the wives of the Greeks inside the Trojan horse.

But in later tellings, Helen becomes Sita, the chaste woman whose chastity is protected by her double; more precisely, both Sita and Helen become Saranyu, a paradigm available to both. (Or, as one might argue, both Saranyu and Helen are indebted to a lost proto-Indo-European original.)⁴⁶ And Saranyu can serve as the model for both the Greek whore and the Hindu wife because Saranyu herself is sexually ambivalent—either more or less sexual than her husband, depending on how you calculate,

⁴⁵ See Cornelia Dimmitt, “Sita: Mother Goddess and Sakti,” in *The Divine Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of India*, ed. Donna Wulff and John Stratton Hawley, Religious Studies Series (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982), pp. 210–23; and O’Flaherty, *Dreams, Illusion, and Other Realities* (n. 1 above), pp. 92–97.

⁴⁶ This is an argument that I advanced in *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts* (n. 23 above), but I find it more comfortable now to argue for simple ancient Indian and Greek contacts.

or who you ask. Sita, too, is ambivalent in her sexuality, especially in the Tamil tradition;⁴⁷ the demoness Shurpanakha is able to double for Sita, David Shulman suggests, because both of them are highly sexual women. Certainly, as we have seen, Ravana is able to abduct Sita, if not to seduce her, because she fell for his masquerade, not as Rama but as an ascetic. But Sita is fooled, and therefore innocent, where Helen fools, and is guilty: this is a paradigm to which we will return.

It is not just that the two traditions are different; they are actually quite close, focusing on the same issues, but they say diametrically opposed things about those issues. The Greek war was situated, and was recognized as being situated, in history; when history changed, the war had to be denied. The Hindu war was quickly appropriated by religion; even when history changed, the war did not have to be denied. By removing Helen, the Greeks problematized the Trojan War, emptied it of its superficial meaning as a war fought for a woman, and opened the way for a new discourse on the futility of war and/or the hollowness of female beauty. The texts about the phantom Helen were composed at a time when the Greeks were again at war, no longer with the Trojans but now with Sparta (Helen's Home), and were questioning the justice of that war (and arguing that it was an extension of the Trojan War). Euripides' *The Trojan Women* (415), in which women explicitly called into question the values of war, was roughly contemporaneous with his *Helen* (412), and Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (411), and made the same point about the Peloponnesian War. It made sense to use the image of Helen to problematize the paradigmatic Trojan War and, by implication, the present wars as well.

By contrast, it was by removing Sita that the Hindus deproblematized (if I may coin a term) the war with Ravana, denying the demon any power at all over the wife of a hero who had become an incarnate God, opening the way for the worship of a man no longer seen as hollow in his mistrust of his wife's beauty. Sita was, in the *Ramayana*, the original excuse for the war, as Helen was for Troy: but Sita was used in what we would nowadays call entrapment, set up precisely so that Ravana would fall in love with her and steal her, thus giving Rama an excuse to destroy him. Yet the Hindus never questioned the futility of that war, for it became a holy war, invoked, even in our day (1991, to be precise), to justify the destruction of the Babri mosque said to have been built on Rama's birthplace.

The two traditions were able to revise their myths because, for very different reasons, the earliest texts (the Epics, the *Ramayana*, and the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*) were not dogmatically fixed. The Hindu text was regarded

⁴⁷ David Shulman, "Sita and Satakantharvana in a Tamil Folk Narrative," *Journal of Indian Folkloristics* 2 (1979): 1–26.

as part of *smṛiti*, human memory, and hence malleable (in contrast with *shruti*, divinely inspired texts such as the Vedas, of which not a syllable could be changed). The Greek text was part of a tradition that was, from the start, of uncertain piety (as Paul Veyne pointed out in his well-named study, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?*). In both traditions, the myths moved through a number of different genres (from Epic to Purana to devotional poetry, in the Hindu tradition, from Epic to drama to satire, in the Greek) in which changes were inevitable—in which they were, indeed, the whole point of the exercise.

By examining the history of the revisions of the two episodes that are superficially the same (a surrogate is found for the abducted heroine; the king must retrieve his abducted wife and kill her abductor), we come to understand how very different the two Epic traditions are, despite their superficial resemblance. Like the two shadow women and the women whom they imitate and replace, the two sets of texts look alike only on the surface.

AHALYA

Let us turn now to two stories about a woman who is not doubled herself but who is, rather, tested by a god who doubles her husband. And let us again begin with India and move to Greece.

The story of Ahalya is one of a number of stories in which the god Indra, king of the gods, impersonates a human husband in order to gain sexual access to a human woman, assuming the form of a particular man in order to commit adultery with the man's wife. Indra shares this propensity with Zeus and Wotan, his Greek and German cousins and counterparts. In many myths of this type, the human woman succeeds in seeing through the illusion in order to remain faithful to her husband. But in the myth of Ahalya, this point is debated. Some variants insist that she could not tell the difference between them; other variants, however, imply that she merely pretended not to see through the illusion in order to sleep with the god.

The question of whether or not the woman chooses to commit adultery is further related to the question of guilt: Who is responsible? Who is punished? In ancient India, these two questions received two different answers. The law books regard the mistaking of another woman for one's own wife as a real possibility. Medhatithi says that the punishment for a man who has slept with his guru's wife—the ultimate incest in Hinduism—applies in a certain case if it was done “with premeditation, because he mistook her for his own wife.”⁴⁸ Medhatithi does not, however,

⁴⁸ Medhatithi, commenting on *The Laws of Manu* 11.106. See *The Laws of Manu: A New Translation of the Manavadharmasastra*, trans. Wendy Doniger with Brian K. Smith, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, 1991).

contemplate the possibility that a wife might be forgiven for making the same mistake about her husband. In *The Laws of Manu*, it is the man who is primarily punished for adultery, yet in the myths, adulterous women are often mutilated or killed. The woman is regarded as naturally responsible on the assumption that all women are seductive, just as all snakes bite; but the man is culturally responsible: knowing that all women are seductive, the male adulterer is at fault when a woman is allowed to do what she is naturally inclined to do. In keeping with this pattern, the tests describe the punishments of both Ahalya and her lover Indra at some length, and these punishments, in many variants of the myth, have implications for the future history of humankind tantamount to the implications of the sin of Adam and Eve in Eden.

In one of the earliest tellings, in the *Ramayana*,⁴⁹ there seems to be no masquerade at all: Indra simply takes Ahalya by force; she was raped (*gharshita*). But subsequent texts tell us that Indra masqueraded as Ahalya's husband, Gautama. This change is made when the *Ramayana* tells the story again in the context of the coming of Rama (whose miraculous power identifies this passage as a later layer of the *Ramayana*). It is an innovation, building on the earlier Vedic texts in which Indra is certainly a sexual trickster but not actually a sexual masquerader, *stricto sensu*. Yet, even now that Indra half-heartedly masquerades as Gautama, Ahalya is, nevertheless, even more deeply implicated than she was when she was raped by Indra in his own form:

The thousand-eyed Indra, the husband of Indrani, knowing that Gautama was absent, put on the sage's garments and said to Ahalya, "Well-made woman, with a beautiful waist, men who want it do not wait for a woman's fertile period. I want to make love with you." Knowing that it was the thousand-eyed god in the garments of the sage, the foolish woman consented, because she was sexually curious about the king of the gods. Then, when her inner heart had gotten what it wanted, she said to the best of the gods, "You have gotten what you wanted; now you must go away quickly. Lord of the gods, my lover, you must always protect yourself and me."

Indra laughed and said to Ahalya, "You have wonderful hips, and I am fully satisfied. I will go back where I came from." And so, after he had made love with her he came out of the hut, hastening in some confusion, worrying about Gautama. But he saw the great sage Gautama entering, full of the power of his ascetic inner heat and unassailable by gods or demons, still damp with the water from his bathing place and blazing like a fire. When the lord of the gods saw him he was terrified and his face fell, but when the virtuous sage saw the wicked thousand-eyed god wearing the garments of the sage, he said, in anger, "You fool, since you have taken my form and done what should not be done, you shall be without your fruit." And as soon as the great-souled Gautama had said this in anger, at that very moment the two testicles of the thousand-eyed god fell down.

⁴⁹ *Ramayana* 7.30.17–36.

When Gautama had cursed Indra, he also cursed his wife: “You will live here for many thousands of years, eating wind, without any food, lying on ashes and generating inner heat. Invisible to all creatures, you will live in this hermitage. And when Rama, who is unassailable, comes to this terrible forest, then you will be purified. By receiving him as a guest you will become free of greed and delusion, you evil woman, and you will take on your own form in my presence, full of joy.”⁵⁰

Indra is eventually restored with the testicles of a ram. But the fact that he really just dresses up as Gautama (assuming his *vesha*, his garments, which does not necessarily imply a change of form, just a change of costume) serves merely to make Ahalya’s sin all the more obvious. The text explicitly tells us that she knew who he was, that she desired him precisely because she knew who he was. Invisibility is, in a sense, merely a variant of the curse in the first text: to have the same beauty as other women is to become invisible. When Indra did, at least, try to disguise himself, Ahalya was cursed to become invisible, for a while; when he simply used brute force, she was cursed to share her beauty with other women. It doesn’t really make much difference at all; Indra might have saved himself the bother.

Several of the manuscripts of the first *Ramayana* text, about the rape and the origin of adultery, insert a brief paragraph (rejected by the critical edition, and probably folded back in from the second *Ramayana* version) in which Indra masquerades successfully and Ahalya herself insists on her innocence, insists that she was fooled:

Ahalya begged Gautama, the great sage, to forgive her, saying, “I was raped, great sage, by the god who had taken your form, because I did not know (who it was). I did not do it out of desire, great sage; you should forgive me.” When Ahalya had said this to Gautama, he replied, “When Rama is born and comes to the forest, and you see him, then you will be purified. When you receive him as a guest you may come back into my presence, and you will live with me.”⁵¹

Gautama may or may not believe her; he modifies her curse in the same terms that he used in the second text, when it was clear that she was not fooled at all. And the modification does not make a great deal of sense: since the curse was the loss of her unique beauty, being purified and permitted the luxury of living with Gautama hardly seem an adequate compensation.

In later retellings, Ahalya continues to know that she is committing adultery, and, as in the first *Ramayana* text, Indra does not even bother to

⁵⁰ *Ramayana* 1.47.15–31.

⁵¹ *Ramayana*, verses excised after 7.30.36.

change into the form, or even the wardrobe, of Gautama. One such variant is found in *The Ocean of the Rivers of Story* (the *Kathasaritsagara*), a medieval Sanskrit text; when caught *in flagrante*, Indra takes the form of a cat, and Ahalya says she is with “the cat” or “my lover.” This ambiguity is made possible because she replies to her husband’s awkward question in a Prakrit dialect; being a woman, she is forbidden to speak Sanskrit, but she uses this disability as a weapon. For *majjao* (“the tom-cat”) may be a dialect version of either of two Sanskrit words: *mad-jaro*, meaning, “my lover,” or *marjaro*, meaning, “the cat” (from the verb *mrij*, to wash, because the cat constantly washes itself).⁵² But since Ahalya both lied and did not lie (it was her lover, but in the form of a cat), she is given a modified curse, which is, appropriately, another pun, on “stone”; Gautama says, “Since you behave like a rolling stone [literally, since you have an evil nature, *shiila*], you will become a stone [*shilaa*] for a long time, until Rama comes into this forest and you see him.” The logic of the curse that turned Ahalya to stone may also be at work in the practice of depicting voluptuous women in the stone sculptures on Hindu temples: it is the best way to capture and control them. (Is this why Lot’s wife was turned to a pillar of salt?). In contemporary wedding ceremonies in Sri Lanka, Ahalya appears as a black stone which the bride touches with, appropriately, her foot.

In other texts, however, Indra goes to great pains to fool Ahalya:

All the four guardians of the quarters, including Indra, lusted for Ahalya. One day, when Gautama had gone to bathe and Ahalya was cleaning the house, preparing to make the offering to the gods, Indra took the corporeal [*gatrena*] form of Gautama and excitedly entered the house. Wearing the garments of the sage, he said to Ahalya, “I am overwhelmed by Kama, the god of erotic love. Give me a kiss and so forth.” But Ahalya replied, “My lord, you should not tell me to abandon the worship of the gods and so forth. This is not the right time for such things.” Indra said, “Enough of this talk. What should and should not be done is decided by a husband’s words. You should obey your husband’s command, especially in matters of sex. Give me an embrace and so forth.” Then he embraced her and fulfilled his desire. [When Gautama returned and accused them,] Ahalya, his chaste wife, said, through her tears, “You should forgive this act, since it was committed in ignorance.” But he replied, “You have committed evil and become impure by having intercourse with another man. For a long time you will stand alone, made of nothing but skin and bones, with no flesh and no nails, and let all the men and women look at you.” In misery, she asked him, “Please set an end to this curse,” and even the sage was flooded by pity, and he said, “When Rama comes to the forest and sees you standing by the path, dried out and bodiless, he

⁵² *Kathasaritsagara* (Bombay: Nirnara Sagara Press, 1930) 17.137–48; *The Ocean of Story*, ed. N. M. Penzer, trans. C. W. Tawney, 10 vols. (London: Chas. J. Sawyer, 1924), 2:46.

will laugh and ask, 'Who is this female with the dried up form, a mere image (of a woman) made of bones?' And when he hears what happened in former times, Rama will say, 'This woman is not at all at fault; it is Indra's fault.' And when he says this, you will lose your disgusting form and take on a divine form and come to my house." And so she dwells with Gautama in heaven even today.⁵³

Ahalya in this text believes that she is with her husband. Indeed, in this quasi-feminist version of the story, it is Ahalya herself, rather than Gautama, who is engaged in an act of piety at the time of the seduction; since she is worshiping the gods, presumably the Vedic gods, the ritual is fulfilled more literally than one might ordinarily expect, or indeed hope, and Indra comes to her in person (albeit in disguise). (On one occasion, Indra masqueraded as the stallion in the horse sacrifice in order to sleep with the sacrificer's queen, a transformation that further connects him with the corpus of Saranyu the mare.)⁵⁴ Her protest that this is not the right time for sex (the South Asian equivalent of, "I have a headache") is an inversion of the amorous male's (or female's) argument, voiced in many versions of the Ahalya myth, that a woman's fertile season *is* the right time, whether or not she has a headache.

Yet this Ahalya is fooled; she really does not know it is Indra and hence does not (as in *The Ocean of the Rivers of Story*) fabricate any half-lie about a cat (though Indra again becomes a cat). Gautama admits (through a projection into Rama's words) that it was all Indra's fault, and even acknowledges that Ahalya's mind was pure—though he himself still curses her for being the helpless victim, for having been physically polluted, or, perhaps, unconsciously "asking for it" by being beautiful. His curse makes her not invisible but hideously old, which comes to the same thing: her youth and beauty vanish. (Sita, too, was rendered invisible when she was merely vulnerable to a rape.) Yet Ahalya is also cursed to have people look at her or, rather, to look at her invisibility, the final humiliation.

In yet another version of the story, Ahalya both does and does not recognize Indra:

One day the sage Narada described Ahalya to Indra, saying, "Once upon a time in the world of death I saw Gautama with Ahalya. No one has beauty like hers, not even the Shadow Samjna [Saranyu], the wife of the Sun." Indra resolved to have her. He became Gautama and came to the sage's hermitage and saw Ahalya at a time when Gautama had gone to bathe. He went inside and said, "Wife, prepare a lovely bed for us!" Then she said, "Why have you stopped reciting [the

⁵³ *Padma Purana*, Anandasrama Sanskrit Series no. 131 (Poona, 1893), 1.56.15–53.

⁵⁴ *Harivamsha* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1969) 111.11–29; see Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Other Peoples' Myths: The Cave of Echoes* (New York: Macmillan, 1988; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 102–3.

Vedas] and come home now? How did you conceive this most despicable desire to make love during the day?" Gautama [*sic*] said, "As soon as I began to bathe, a lovely nymph came there to bathe alone and appeared naked within my sight. Her lower lip was like the bilva fruit, her body was exquisite, and she had superb full breasts. Lovely lady, my heart was oppressed by the arrows of the god of erotic love, and I could not stick to my recitations. So I came back to the hermitage. Make love with me now, my darling! Or else you will see me dead, burnt by the fire of desire, or I will curse you and go away." Ahalya said, "I will obey your command, because a woman has no duty but to obey her husband."

Believing that he was her own husband because of his voice, body, and unconscious gestures, Ahalya got into the bed to make love with Indra, the god who bears the thunderbolt. Without hesitation, Indra, in the shape of Gautama, played with her, kissing and embracing her, unfastening her waistband, and so forth. But when she smelled his celestial fragrances she became startled and very doubtful. In her mind she reasoned, "Is this a man who has taken on a deceptive form? He could become a severe stain on me like the stain on the moon." And in anger she asked that rogue, "Who are you in this deceptive form? I was convinced it was my husband's form. Speak, or I will curse you."

When he heard this, Indra displayed his own shape [*vapus*], because he was frightened of a curse, and he said, "Know that I am Indra, the husband of Indrani." When she heard this, the sage's wife became furious and said, seeming to vomit a flame from her mouth, "Because your shape was his, you fool, you idiot, I don't know what will happen when my husband arrives. You have shattered my fidelity to my husband, you evil wretch. What will happen to me when I am cursed by Gautama's voice?"

Gautama came home and called to her to bring him water. She came and told him what had happened: "The depraved Indra, lord of the gods, assumed your form. Mistakenly thinking that it was certainly you, I obeyed your command exactly. But when I smelled his celestial fragrances, I became uncertain once again and said, 'Evil man, tell me who you are.' . . . Forgive me this transgression. It is not a fault when one declares it oneself, but only when someone else declares it."

The sage cursed his own wife to become a stone, adding: "You will not recognize my own form, my own unconscious gestures, or my movement, because your lustful heart has been fixed on another man." And he promised that she would be released when touched by the foot of Rama.⁵⁵

Narada compares Ahalya with the Shadow Samjna (Saranyu), and at one point Indra is said to be like the Sun, two rather casual references that link this sexual masquerade to that paradigmatic one. This time there is no ambiguity about Ahalya's deception, for Indra is actually said to become Gautama [*Gautamo bhut*], with Gautama's body, as usual, but now also with his voice and his unconscious gestures [*bhavas*], more intimate

⁵⁵ *Ganesha Purana, Upasana Khanda* (Bombay: Gopala Narayana Co., 1892), chap. 30, "The Violation of Ahalya," chap. 31, "The Description of Indra's Curse," and chaps. 32–33.

details that Indra does not usually take the trouble to copy. (It is Gautama's voice, too, that Ahalya fears when she anticipates his curse.)

What Indra fails to mimic, however, is the smell of mortality: the clue that makes Ahalya realize her mistake is Indra's celestial fragrance, a perfume produced by the absence of putrefying flesh. For although Indra has Gautama's form (*rupa*) and shape (*vapus*), these are visual qualities that would not include evidence for the other senses. Indra sounds like Gautama (he has Gautama's voice), and he looks like Gautama, but he doesn't smell like Gautama. Actually, Indra doesn't really act like Gautama, either: Ahalya remarks on his uncharacteristic lust, but she goes along with it—indeed, she does not notice the smell until he has kissed her, embraced her, untied her waistband, “and so forth”—the “so forth” apparently including enough to constitute a stain on her fidelity. Nor does Indra talk like Gautama, even though he has Gautama's voice: Ahalya could probably have guessed it was Indra by the fact that he threatens to curse and abandon her if she *does not* make love, the reverse of Gautama's predictable position. She might also have noted that, with a tactlessness characteristic of his cousin Zeus (*Iliad* 14.223), Indra propositions her by telling her how he has desired another woman and, later, keeps talking about his jealous wife: he identifies himself to Ahalya as “Indra, the husband of Indrani.”

The curse of becoming a stone is now explicitly glossed as the appropriate punishment for the crime of nonrecognition: now Ahalya will not be expected to recognize anyone's form or gestures (or movements, *ceshtitani*), all of which she herself will henceforth lack; in particular, she will not be able to recognize her husband, a petrification of the very flaw for which she is being petrified. This text is equally specific about the release from the curse: it is the touch of Rama's foot, not the mere sight of Rama or the words of Rama, that will release Ahalya.

In several South Indian variants of the story, Ahalya recognizes Indra. In Kampan's Tamil *Ramayana*, it is said that Indra “sneaked into the hermitage wearing the exact body of Gautama, whose heart knew no falsehoods. Sneaking in, he joined Ahalya; coupled, they drank deep of the clear new wine of first-night weddings, and she knew. Yet unable to put aside what was not hers, she dallied in her joy, but the sage did not tarry, he came back, a very Shiva with three eyes in his head.”⁵⁶ (In R. K. Narayan's retelling of Kampan's version of the story, “She surrendered herself, but at some stage realized that the man enjoying her was an impostor; but she could do nothing about it.”)⁵⁷ Here Gautama has not

⁵⁶ Kampan, *Ramayana*, cited and translated by A. K. Ramanujan, “Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation,” in *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of Narrative Traditions in South Asia*, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 22–49, esp. p. 29.

⁵⁷ R. K. Narayan, *The Ramayana* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p. 21.

merely the special gaze of ascetic inner heat but the extra eye of the great ascetic god, Shiva, in contrast with the promiscuously superfluous eyes of Indra.⁵⁸ He also shares Shiva's penchant for asceticism, as A. K. Ramanujan remarks: "In Kampan, Ahalya realizes she is doing wrong but cannot let go of the forbidden joy; the poem has also suggested earlier that her sage-husband is all spirit, details which together add a certain psychological subtlety to the seduction." In K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar's modern retelling, Ahalya maintains that she did not know Indra's identity.⁵⁹

But Ahalya's complicity, and Gautama's inadequacies, are developed in far greater detail in a highly sophisticated Telugu rendering which retells the story of Ahalya and Gautama without even bothering to pay lip service, as it were, to the idea of female fidelity; instead, it paints Indra and Ahalya as Romantic adulterers.⁶⁰ This Ahalya knows that someone else might have taken the form of Gautama, someone who is "like" not only Gautama but Indra, and, unlike the Ahalya whom Rama declared free of fault, she recognizes Indra when he expounds a hedonistic doctrine (echoing Ravana's line, to Vedavati, about losing her youth, though this time in an extended argument reminiscent of Fitzgerald's Omar Khayyam, or John Donne to his Coy Mistress), which Gautama never would have uttered. She recognizes the impostor because he desires her, and her husband does not. She recognizes Indra not by any particular sense, not because he looks or smells like Indra, but because he makes use of all of *his* senses in bed, unlike her husband. Gautama refuses to make love to her, arguing that it is *not* her fertile season. Yet, precisely because Indra says he loves her, she insists on knowing who he really is; otherwise, she says, it would be rape. The basic image of the woman turned into a stone is here predicted by Ahalya herself when she comments, as she contemplates succumbing to Indra, "A woman should turn herself to stone, and give up all thought of pleasure." Yet, just as Ahalya knows that her heart will melt at Indra's touch, so the stone Ahalya melts at Rama's touch.

ALCMENA

In the West, the Greek and Roman myth of the seduction of Alcmena by Zeus/Jupiter in the form of her husband, Amphitryon, has given its name to one variant of the sexual masquerade. Otto Rank, for instance, refers

⁵⁸ Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Siva: The Erotic Ascetic* (London and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁵⁹ R. K. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sitayana: Epic of the Earth-Born* (Madras: Samata Books, 1987), canto 13.

⁶⁰ *Ahalyasankrandanam* of Venkata Krsnappa Nayakudu, trans. David Shulman, Velcheru Narayana Rao, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam in *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamil Nadu* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 145–68.

to it as “the Amphitryon motif,”⁶¹ though a less sexist title might be “the Alcmena motif” since her dilemma is the subject of the myth. The myth of Alcmena and Amphitryon has been reinterpreted throughout Western literature—notably by Plautus, Molière, Henrich von Kleist, and Jean Giraudoux—and each generation has found new meanings in it.

Zeus (or, later, Jupiter, the Roman name for the Greek god Zeus) is, like his cousin Indra, a trickster, implicated in a number of different sorts of sexual masquerades. The myth of Amphitryon is mentioned in enough Greek sources to make it clear that it was known, indeed well known, in Greek. Homer refers to “Amphitryon’s wife, Alcmena, who, after lying in love in the embraces of great Zeus, brought forth Herakles” (*Odyssey* 2.266–68), and in the *Iliad* (14.323) Zeus lists Alcmena among the women he seduced in his own person, but there is no talk here of a masquerade, nothing about fooling her with the form of Amphitryon. The seduction of Alcmena by Zeus was the subject of plays by Sophocles and Euripides which have perished⁶² and is told by Ovid, who says that Jove, as Amphitryon, “took” Alcmena,⁶³ using an ambiguous verb which we could take to mean either “tricked” or “had” sexually. Zeus here eschews both rape (his usual *modus operandi*) and bestiality (his second favorite); where the masquerade might often be regarded as an insult to a woman’s intelligence, here, at least, it is intended *not* to insult her fidelity.

The myth of Alcmena is in many ways a gendered reversal (and hence a reversal in other ways) of the myth of Saranyu: both Alcmena and Saranyu give birth to twins (male for Alcmena, male, male/female, and human/equine, for Saranyu) who have doubled parents. But where Saranyu’s twins have ambiguous mothers, Alcmena’s twins—Herakles and Iphikles—have different fathers. Plautus (followed by almost all subsequent versions—Kleist is an exception) maintains the tradition of the twins,⁶⁴ but now, in addition to telling one husband from the other, Alcmena must tell one son from the other. Plautus tells us that Hera, out of jealousy, sent two serpents (even the snakes are doubled!) to kill the infant boys; the infant Herakles strangled the monsters with his tiny hands, thereby proving his divine parentage. (Others say that Amphitryon himself put the two serpents with the children in order to determine which of

⁶¹ Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, trans. and ed. with an introduction by Harry Tucker, Jr. (New York: New American Library, 1971), p. 14.

⁶² *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, ed. A. Nauck, 2d ed. (Frankfurt, 1889), pp. 156, 386 ff.

⁶³ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Library, 1977), 6.112; for the Latin *cepit*, the Loeb translator gives “cheated.”

⁶⁴ Plautus, *Amphitryon: Three Plays in New Verse Translation* (Plautus, Molière, Kleist), *Together with a Comprehensive Account of the Evolution of the Legend and Its Subsequent History on the Stage*, trans. Charles E. Passage and James H. Mantinband (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974), lines 103–10 and 480–94, pp. 43 and 61.

the twins was his own child.)⁶⁵ The terror of the infant Iphikles revealed that *he* was the mortal offspring—and therefore the one that Amphitryon wanted, claimed as his own. Unlike their fathers, apparently, the children are distinguished by their actions: the one who fights the snake is the son of Jupiter—that is, the *real* son of Zeus, his desired son, is the child of the *false* Amphitryon.

Does Alcmena desire Zeus? Plautus assumes that Alcmena did not knowingly sleep with someone other than her husband Amphitryon. He takes pains to have Mercury promise that no one will suspect her of adultery, that their love affair will remain a secret, and that Amphitryon will be told the whole story, so that no one will think Alcmena guilty.⁶⁶ So, too, in Euripides, when Amphitryon is about to burn Alcmena alive as an adulteress, Zeus descends as *deus ex machina* and sends thunder, lightning, and rain to avert the innocent woman's death.⁶⁷ But this, of course, proves only that Zeus, rather than some mere mortal, fathered her child, not that she thought he was Amphitryon. So, too, in the "interpolated scenes" composed by Cardinal Hermolaus Barbarus in 1480 C.E. in imitation of Plautus, as well as in Molière and Kleist, Amphitryon is told that Jupiter announced that he himself was Alcmena's secret lover and father of the baby who had strangled both the snakes (the other being Amphitryon's).

But Molière and Kleist imply that Alcmena suspected that she was in bed with someone other than her husband. In Molière's telling, Mercury implies that Alcmena was not seduced but actually initiated the whole affair herself, bringing Jupiter down from the skies "in the semblance that she cherished most in love."⁶⁸ As usual, the woman who was impregnated by the god is accused of adultery (like Mary by Joseph). Early Greek texts implied that Alcmena slept only with Zeus, not with Amphitryon. But it is essential for the later psychological variants of Molière and Kleist that she sleeps with both the god and the mortal, in order to raise the twin problems of knowledge (if she had not slept with Amphitryon, it is more likely that she would not have been able to tell him from Jupiter in bed) and jealousy ("Which did you like best?" Jupiter keeps asking). Kleist's Jupiter continually uses theological double-talk to confuse Alcmena as he impersonates himself. First of all, he keeps "pretending" to be Jupiter. He tells Alcmena that he is a god, that Juno had never pleased him so much in bed, and that he lives on the nectar of Alcmena's love.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Pherecydes, cited by Apollodorus, *The Library*, text and translation by J. G. Frazer, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, 1921), 1.8.

⁶⁶ Plautus, *Amphitryon* (n. 64 above), lines 480–94, p. 61.

⁶⁷ Euripides, cited by Passage (n. 64 above), p. 11.

⁶⁸ Molière, *Amphitryon* (n. 64 above), lines 1691 ff.; Passage (n. 64 above), pp. 182–84.

⁶⁹ Kleist, *Amphitryon* (n. 64 above), act 2, scene 2.

This is yet another instance of Jupiter's persistent bad habit of mentioning one woman when he is in bed with another—a habit peculiarly designed to excite the jealousy of the women that he himself is so jealous of. And when he finally confesses, "It was no mortal man that came to you / Last night, but Jupiter himself, the god of thunder," Alcmena is too confused to recognize the truth when she sees it, and she berates "Amphitryon" ("you godless man") for blaming the gods for his own sacrilege. It could not have been a god, she argues, or else she would "perish in such radiance" and there would be no life coursing through her "warm heart" at that moment.⁷⁰

When she notices a difference between the two forms of Amphitryon, she interprets this as nothing but a heightening of Amphitryon himself, as if in a dream, larger than life, "more beautiful than ever / Last night," as if he were "his own picture, / A painting of him by an artist's hand, / Quite true to life, yet heightened to the godlike."⁷¹ She experiences great ambivalence between her feelings, which respond differently to Jupiter than they did to Amphitryon, and her mind, which is befogged by the arguments that they are the same person (arguments also reinforced by cognitive dissonance: if they are not the same person, she's an adulteress). Jupiter, in his own persona, confuses Alcmena even more by asking her how she would feel if she were, actually, in bed with him (the god) but still thought he was Amphitryon, and just then Amphitryon were to appear. Alcmena hedges: "Yes—I would then be sad, and I would wish / That he were the god, and that you would / Remain Amphitryon, as you surely are." Just as a woman who is raped might think of her husband in an attempt to remain faithful, Alcmena recognizes only her husband in an attempt to remain innocent.

Alcmena finally chooses the wrong one, Jupiter. When she realizes her mistake, she pleads with Jupiter, "Leave me forever in my error if / Your light is not to shade my soul forever." The imagery of light and shade and soul implies that the error in which Alcmena wishes to remain consists in believing, wrongly, that the man she has made love with was just her husband; she is asking to be protected from looking on the face of god-head directly. This seems to satisfy Jupiter at last, for he reveals his true identity and blesses them all.

AHALYA AND ALCMENA

Ahalya is innocent in early tellings, guilty in later tellings, when she clearly recognizes Indra and sleeps with him anyway. Alcmena is usu-

⁷⁰ Ibid., scene 5.

⁷¹ Ibid., scene 4.

ally assumed to be innocent; she only realizes what is happening when both Amphytryons confront one another, as the double Sitas and Helens do in certain texts, and Ahalya's husband(s) only in one or two.

But, though I have chosen, for my present purposes, to look closely at the women, Ahalya and Alcmena (and Sita and Helen), this somewhat distorts the texts. In fact, the mythologies devote more time to the men than to the women, in particular to the quandary of Zeus/Jupiter in wanting to be loved for himself and to the quandary of Indra, whose various mutilations are described at some length. Zeus gets away with it, mostly; Indra does not. Zeus suffers inner torment, while Indra is physically mutilated (as is Ahalya, who also suffers inner torment in some texts).

The Hindu tradition regards Indra's suffering and restoration as a ritual problem, involving, first, the sacrifice of a ram, and later, visits to various Hindu shrines. The Greek tradition, divorced from any ritual specific to the text, treats the theme of Zeus's suffering in the realm of theology. Yet, at the time of the composition of most of these texts, Indra was no longer worshiped and had been supplanted by other gods; Zeus, on the other hand, at least at the beginning of the tradition, was still God, and texts composed within European traditions where he was no longer God began to treat him with less and less reverence. Ahalya remains a part of the Hindu wedding ritual tradition to this day, where she is literally the *touchstone* of wifely fidelity, while Alcmena, and even Amphytryon, are largely forgotten.

The point of the Greek myth is to justify the divine parentage of the son that results from the seduction of Alcmena—Herakles—while no child results from the seduction of Ahalya. And this is worthy of note since so many Hindu stories of divine seductions are, like the Greek tale of Alcmena (and other, similar tales, explaining the divine parentage of Achilles, Sarpedon, etc.), precisely designed to justify the divine parentage of sons, such as the Pandavas in the *Mahabharata*. The Greek tradition, rationalist even at the start, debates this point: Semele's story about the divine birth of Dionysus is challenged (though ultimately affirmed), while the divine parentage of the Pandavas is accepted without question.

DID SHE FALL, OR WAS SHE PUSHED?

When we compare the myths of Ahalya and Alcmena, Sita and Helen, certain interesting patterns emerge. Ahalya is to Alcmena, not as Sita is to Helen, but as Helen is to Sita; that is, Ahalya is, like Helen, the paradigmatic beauty and paradigmatic whore in Hindu civilization, directly contrasted (even in her name) with Sita: Sita was born from a furrow that her father was plowing; Ahalya, by contrast, whose name means "not to be plowed," is the field that is plowed by one man too many, a

significant designation, given the importance in Hinduism of the agricultural metaphor of the legitimate wife as the field that belongs to her husband. Alcmena, in contrast, becomes a paragon and paradigm of virtue in Greek and European mythology, like Sita in Hindu mythology. Where Indra, in some texts, first tries in vain to seduce Ahalya in his own form and only then resorts to the device of impersonating her husband, Jupiter succeeds first in impersonating Alcmena's husband and only afterward tries, in vain, to seduce her in his own form. Together, the two sets of myths provide double paradigms for two cultures, one virtuous woman and one whore per culture. Yet they assign different sorts of stories to the two women: the whore is given the shadow double in Greece and falls for the god in Hinduism, while the chaste wife is given the shadow double in Hinduism and falls for the god in Greece.

On the surface, the texts seem to be saying that the woman who is fooled is innocent: the innocent Sita is fooled by Ravana, while the guilty Helen fools the other Greeks; the innocent Alcmena is fooled, while the guilty Ahalya is not. But, in fact, the woman who is fooled is often said to be guilty, too; heads she loses, tails she loses. The narrators of these stories do not regard the women who are fooled as morally superior to men. On the contrary. For in addition to distinguishing between stories in which women are fooled (Alcmena, mostly) and stories in which they are not (Ahalya, sometimes), we must further subdivide this second group into stories in which the woman (like Sita with Ravana) is not fooled and therefore resists the masquerading god, and stories (like other versions of the tale of Ahalya) in which the woman, still not fooled, nevertheless goes ahead and sleeps with the masquerading god. In this latter variant, though the end result is the same as that of the woman who is fooled, the woman is far worse than foolish: she is a knowing and complicitous pseudovictim. The accusation that the woman pretends to be fooled when in fact she is not fooled floats just under the surface of the long history of the myths of Alcmena and Ahalya.

For when a woman is the victim of a masquerade, the text often asks: "Was she really fooled?" It is as if the texts assume that women are always the tricksters, never the victims, and therefore that any apparent counterinstance must be justified by arguing that the woman was not, in fact, victimized, that even when she appears to be the victim her trick consists in pretending to be tricked by the trickster. You can't snow the snowman, but you can't cheat an honest (wo)man, either. And when women are not being blamed for being too cunning to be tricked, they are blamed for being so stupid that they can be tricked. The argument that "she really knew" plays precisely the role in myths in which men trick women as the argument that "she asked for it" plays in sexist discussions of rape: it shifts the blame from the perpetrator to the victim.

CONCLUSION

I have argued here primarily for cross-cultural, rather than universalistic, comparisons: I have stressed factors that these two cultures, ancient Greek and Hindu, have in common in part from their hypothetically shared proto-Indo-European heritage or from cultural contact between Greece and India. But they also share factors that transcend cultural barriers. We may isolate certain contrasting patterns in the behavior of men and women in comparable situations and a number of clear asymmetries of gender in the depiction of woman as objects. We have noted, for instance, that the stories assume that the men are fooled (by Sita and Helen) and that the women (Ahalya and Alcmena) are not; when the women seem to be fooled, the story questions whether or not they are faking it. The women (Sita and Helen) produce doubles in order to get away from the men who pursue them, in order not to be in a particular bed; the men (Zeus and Indra) masquerade in order to get into a bed where they are not wanted. This may be because both biology and society conspire to produce situations in which men, more often than women, aggressively seek sexual encounters—women are more often raped than raping—or simply because *stories* emphasize male seduction over female seduction. And although the initial premise is the same in variants where women double or men masquerade—a man wishes to sleep with a woman against her will—when *she* produces the double she avoids the encounter (because she outnumbers him two to one), while when *he* produces the double she is tricked into the encounter (because he outnumbers her two to one).

What similarities there are in these stories are there because men in different cultures depict women in similar ways (and as different from men). I think these contrasting stories show that differences in gender are more significant than differences in culture: women in Hindu stories are more like women in Greek stories than they are like men in Hindu stories. The women resemble one another, across cultures, in certain ways more than they resemble the men within their own cultures. That is, gender transcends culture in establishing lines of convergences between texts that tell the same sorts of stories about men and women in different cultures. It is easier to transform a Hindu story about a woman into a Greek story about a woman (or the reverse) than to transform the tale of a doubled woman into the tale of a doubled man in the same culture. We began by assuming that the two sets of texts, Hindu and Greek, were shadows of one another; and we may conclude by noting that in each set of texts, culture is the shadow of gender.



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Wendy Doniger

*Reading the “Kamasutra”:
the strange & the familiar*

The *Kamasutra* is the oldest extant Hindu textbook of erotic love, and one of the oldest in the world. It is not, as most people think, a book about the positions in sexual intercourse. It is a book about the art of living – finding a partner, maintaining power in a marriage, committing adultery, living as or with a courtesan, using drugs – and also about the positions in sexual intercourse. It was composed in Sanskrit, the literary language of ancient India, probably sometime in the second half of the third century of the Common Era, in North India, perhaps in Pataliputra (near the present city of Patna, in Bihar).

Wendy Doniger, a Fellow of the American Academy since 1989, is Mircea Eliade Professor of the History of Religions at the University of Chicago Divinity School and director of the Martin Marty Center. Among her numerous books are “Siva: The Erotic Ascetic” (1973), “The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology” (1976), “Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India” (1999), and “The Woman Who Pretended to Be Who She Was” (2005). She has also published a new translation of the “Kamasutra” (with Sudhir Kakar, 2002).

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Virtually nothing is known about the author, Vatsyayana Mallanaga, other than his name and what little we learn from the text. Nor do we know anything about Yashodhara, who wrote the definitive commentary in the thirteenth century. But Vatsyayana tells us something important about his text, namely, that it is a distillation of the works of a number of authors who preceded him, authors whose texts have not come down to us. Vatsyayana cites them often – sometimes in agreement, sometimes in disagreement – though his own voice always comes through, as ringmaster over the many acts he incorporates in his sexual circus.

The *Kamasutra* was therefore certainly not the first of its genre, nor was it the last. But the many textbooks of eroticism that follow it eliminate most of the *Kamasutra*’s encyclopedic social and psychological narratives and concentrate primarily on the sexual positions, of which they describe many more than are found in the *Kamasutra*.

Conspicuous by its absence, however, is what Europeans call the ‘missionary’ position, which the *Kamasutra* mentions briefly but without enthusiasm: “In the ‘cup,’ both partners stretch out both of their two legs straight. There are two variants: the ‘cup lying on the side’ or

'the cup supine.'" (2.6.16 – 17) The commentator, too, scorns this position: "How does he penetrate her in this position? It is so easy that there is nothing to worry about!" So much for what Europeans generally regarded as the default position.

By contrast, the default position for ancient Indian men and women – overwhelmingly favored in illustrations of the *Kamasutra* – is something entirely different, as Monty Python used to say. The *Kamasutra* describes three variants:

Her head thrown down, her pelvis raised up, she is "wide open." Without lowering her thighs, suspending them while spreading them wide apart, she receives him in the "yawning" position. Parting her thighs around his sides, at the same time she pulls her knees back around her own sides, in the "Junoesque" position, which can only be done with practice. (2.6.8, 10 – 11)

Some variants of these positions are more complex. In some, her thighs are bent back so far that, in effect, he enters her from the rear even though she is facing him: "When he raises her pelvis and thrusts into her from below, violently, it is called 'grinding down.'" (2.8.24) Significantly, this is the position that the *Kamasutra* advises a man to use when the woman's genitals are much smaller than his.

Size, and its importance, becomes apparent from the very start of the part of the text describing the sexual act:

The man is called a "hare," "bull," or "stallion," according to the size of his sexual organ; a woman, however, is called a "doe," "mare," or "elephant cow." And so there are three equal couplings, between sexual partners of similar size, and six unequal ones, between sexual partners of dissimilar size. (2.1.1)

And when the text describes the possible positions, it uses these sizes keyed to animal types as its basic referents:

At the moment of passion, in a coupling where the man is larger than the woman, a "doe" positions herself in such a way as to stretch herself open inside. A "doe" generally has three positions to choose from: the "wide open," the "yawning," or the "Junoesque." (2.6.1, 7)

The man's fear that his penis is not big enough – the recurrent leitmotif of spam on the Internet today – had apparently already raised its ugly head in ancient India. As a result, the doe became the favored woman, the ideal erotic partner.

The initial passage defining the three sizes continues: "The equal couplings are the best, the one when the man is much larger or much smaller than the woman are the worst, and the rest are intermediate. Even in the medium ones, it is better for the man to be larger than the woman." (2.1.1, 3 – 4) Thus two different, conflicting agendas are set forth from the start: ideally, equal is best, but in fact the man has to be bigger, because women are by nature bigger. The biggest woman (the elephant cow) is much larger than the biggest man (the stallion).

The problem of satisfaction posed by the greater size of women is not easily solved, in part because it is not physical but mental. No proto-Kinsey went around in ancient India measuring women's vulvas. It is a matter of fantasy, apparently a cross-cultural human fantasy, and it is not about physiology (for which the *Kamasutra* offers physical correctives) but about desire. And desire is affected not merely by size but also by intensity and duration:

A man has dull sexual energy if, at the time of making love, his enthusiasm is different, his virility small, and he cannot

bear to be wounded, and a man has average or fierce sexual energy in the opposite circumstances. The same goes for the woman. And so, just as with size, so with temperament, too, there are nine sorts of couplings. And similarly, with respect to endurance, men are quick, average, and long-lasting. (2.1.5 – 8, 30 – 31)

The passage then concludes that the woman should reach her climax first. Why? The commentator explains:

The best case is when the man and woman achieve their sexual pleasure at the same time, because that is an equal coupling. But if it does not happen at the same time, and the man reaches his climax first, his banner is no longer at full mast, and the woman does not reach her climax. Therefore, if the coupling is unequal rather than equal, the woman should be treated with kisses, embraces, and so forth, in such a way that she achieves her sexual pleasure first. When the woman reaches her climax first, the man, remaining inside her, puts on speed and reaches his own climax.

So the problem of fit is merely one aspect of the greater problem of satisfaction. Just as mares are bigger than hares, the logic goes, so, the commentator points out in the context of an argument about female orgasm, women have far more desire than men: “Women want a climax that takes a long time to produce, because their desire is eight times that of a man. Given these conditions, it is perfectly right to say that ‘a fair-eyed woman cannot be sated by men,’ because men’s desire is just one-eighth of women’s.” (2.1.19) Here he is quoting a well-known Sanskrit saying: “A fire is never sated by any amount of logs, nor the ocean by the rivers that flow into it; death cannot be sated by all the creatures in the world, nor a fair-eyed woman by any amount of men.” In another

text, a female-to-male bisexual says that when she was a woman, she had eight times as much pleasure (*kama*) as a man, which could also be translated as eight times as much desire.¹

But the *Kamasutra* had its ways of coping with satisfaction, a kind of end-run around the obstacle of size. Just as there are ways for a doe to expand, so, too, the *Kamasutra* assures us, “In a coupling where the man is smaller, an ‘elephant cow’ contracts herself inside . . . Sex tools may also be used.” (2.1.3, 6) (The commentator helpfully remarks, “If he is larger than she is, there is no need for sex tools.”) The “grinding down” position, in which the woman bends her thighs so close to her chest that the man enters her from below, is particularly effective for this: “He thrusts from below into the lower part of her vagina, violently, because the itch is most extensive in the lower part of the vagina.” (2.8.24) The *Kamasutra* also provides an extensive collection of recipes that are the ancient Indian equivalent of Viagra, a combination of drugs and surgical procedures to increase the size of the penis; and just as the doe may use drugs to expand, the elephant cow may use drugs to contract: “An ointment made of the white flowers of the ‘cuckoos’-eye’ caper bush makes an ‘elephant-cow’ contract tightly for one night.” (7.2.36)

At this point, it might seem that ancient India had come to terms with what Freud called penis envy (referring to women, though Woody Allen wisely remarked that it is more of a problem for

1 Wendy Doniger, *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 287 – 292 (the tale of Chudala, in the *Yogavasistha*). Some Greek texts maintain that Teiresias, too, said that women have not just more pleasure, but *nine times* as much pleasure as men – thereby one-upping the Indian ante. *Ibid.*, 293.

men). Perhaps size does not matter after all?

Well, no. A counterweight to the problem of desire is the problem of vulnerability. It turns out that a man may be caught between the Scylla of a woman who is too big, producing a kind of sexual agoraphobia, and the Charybdis of a woman who is too small, inspiring a kind of sexual claustrophobia. Let us return to our ideal woman, the doe, and look again at the first position recommended for her, the "wide open" position. It turns out to be rather dangerous. The commentator warns:

When she is making love with the man's penis inside her, she should slide back with her hips; or when the man is making love with her he should slide back little by little, so that they do not press together too tightly. For if he moves inside her too roughly, she can be injured, and the man's foreskin can be torn off, which physicians call "ruptured foreskin."

So the small woman may be too small. But it gets worse: the too-large woman may also become too small, by overcompensating, as it were, for her size. The elephant cow is encouraged to employ a sexual position that catapults her unsuspecting partner from the frying pan of insatiable enormity to the fire of strangulating tightness. It begins, disarmingly, with the harmless missionary position:

Both partners stretch out both of their two legs straight. If, as soon as he has penetrated her, he squeezes her two thighs together tightly, it becomes the "squeeze." If she then crosses her thighs, it becomes the "circle." In the "mare's trap," which can only be done with practice, she grasps him, like a mare, so tightly that he cannot move. (2.6.13 – 20)

There is also a variation with the woman on top: "When she grasps him in the 'mare's trap' position and draws him more deeply into her or contracts around him and holds him there for a long time, that is the 'tongs.'" (2.8.33) The commentator adds helpfully: "She uses the lips of the vagina as a tongs."

This is the only sexual position that the *Kamasutra* associates with a mare, and, confusingly, it is reserved for the "elephant cow" rather than the "mare" woman. The confusion arises because the horse, hypersexualized, is the only animal that appears on both the male and the female sides of the initial triads of men and women. Though the male and female equines are not paired – the stallion is the largest male, while the mare is merely the middle-sized woman – Hindu mythology regards the mare as sexually dangerous, bursting with repressed violence: the doomsday fire is lodged in the mouth of a mare who wanders on the floor of the ocean, waiting for the moment when she will be released to burn everything to ashes.² The mare is the sexual animal par excellence; the commentator on the *Kamasutra*, glossing the phrase "two people of the same species" (in the argument that women have the same sort of climax as men), offers this example, surely not at random: "Two people of different species, such as a man and a mare, would have different kinds of sensual pleasure; and so he specifies the same species, the human species." (2.1.24)

The conflation, in an animal image, of the woman who is too big with the woman who traps you (and is, in that sense, too small) begins in ancient India in a text from about 900 BCE:

2 Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Siva: The Erotic Ascetic* (London and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 289 – 292.

Long-Tongue was a demoness who had vaginas on every limb of her body. To subdue her, the god Indra equipped his grandson with penises on every limb and sent him to her. As soon as he had his way with her, he remained firmly stuck in her; Indra then ran at her and struck her down with his thunderbolt.³

Long-Tongue is a dog, and she and the grandson of Indra (the ancient Indian counterpart of Zeus/Wotan/Odin, a notorious womanizer) get stuck together as dogs sometimes do; in this case, it spells her death, and not his, but clearly it is an image of excess that corresponds to her excessively numerous vaginas, each one presumably demanding to be satisfied. So this is the catch-22: if the woman is too big, you cannot satisfy her, but if she is too small (*or too big*), you may be injured and/or trapped inside her.

This example points as well to the tendency to identify women, more than men, as animals, as is also assumed in a passage from the *Kamasutra* that makes women, in contrast with men, creatures both explicitly likened to animals and said to speak a meaningless animal language:

There are eight kinds of screaming: whimpering, groaning, babbling, crying, panting, shrieking, or sobbing. And there are various sounds that have meaning, such as “Mother!” “Stop!” “Let go!” “Enough!” As a major part of moaning she may use, according to her imagination, the cries of the dove, cuckoo, green pigeon, parrot, bee, nightingale, goose, duck, and partridge. He strikes her on her

back with his fist when she is seated on his lap. Then she pretends to be unable to bear it and beats him in return, while groaning, crying, or babbling. If she protests, he strikes her on the head until she sobs, using a hand whose fingers are slightly bent, which is called the “outstretched hand.” At this she babbles with sounds inside her mouth, and she sobs. When the sex ends, there is panting and crying. Shrieking is a sound like a bamboo splitting, and sobbing sounds like a berry falling into water. Always, if a man tries to force his kisses and so forth on her, she moans and does the very same thing back to him. When a man in the throes of passion slaps a woman repeatedly, she uses words like “Stop!” or “Let me go!” or “Enough!” or “Mother!” and utters screams mixed with labored breathing, panting, crying, and groaning. As passion nears its end, he beats her extremely quickly, until the climax. At this, she begins to babble, fast, like a partridge or a goose. Those are the ways of groaning and slapping. (2.7.1-21)

It is worth noting that these women make the noises of birds, never of mammals, let alone the mammals that characterize the three paradigmatic sizes of women. Moreover, one of the birds whose babbling the sexual woman imitates – the parrot – appears elsewhere in the *Kamasutra* as one of the two birds who can be taught to speak like humans. (1.3.15, 1.4.8, 6.1.15) The passage about slapping and groaning inculcates what we now recognize as the rape mentality – ‘her mouth says no, but her eyes say yes’ – a dangerous line of thought that leads ultimately to places where we now no longer want to be: disregarding a woman’s protests against rape. And this treatment of women is justified by a combination of the official naming of women after oversized animals and the

3 Jaiminiya Brahmana, 1.161 – 163. Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *Tales of Sex and Violence: Folklore, Sacrifice, and Danger in the Jaiminiya Brahmana* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 101.

expectation that in the throes of passion women will speak like animals, meaninglessly.

The practice of naming the sexual movements after animals – the “boar’s thrust,” the “bull’s thrust,” “frolicking like a sparrow” (2.8.27 – 29) – also implies that there is a very basic sense in which sex, even when done according to the book, as it were, is bestial. But despite its recurrent zoological terminology, the *Kamasutra* argues that people are not animals, and that the sexuality of animals is different from that of humans. The very passages in which people are advised, for the sake of variety, to imitate the sexual behavior of animals, or in which women are told to mimic the cries of animals, imply that such behavior is, by definition, different from ours.

Vatsyayana distinguishes human sexuality from animal sexuality in the argument that he puts forward at the very beginning to justify his text:

Scholars say: “Since even animals manage sex by themselves, and since it goes on all the time, it should not have to be handled with the help of a text.” Vatsyayana says: Because a man and a woman depend upon one another in sex, it requires a method, and this method is learnt from the *Kamasutra*. The mating of animals, by contrast, is not based upon any method, because they are not fenced in, they mate only when the females are in their fertile season and until they achieve their goal, and they act without thinking about it first. (1.2.16 – 20)

Humans, whose sexuality is more complex than that of animals, are more repressed – “fenced in,” as the text puts it. Therefore, they have a different sexuality from animals, and need a text for it, where animals do not. The *Kamasutra*’s claim to fame is precisely that it has found ways – positions, tools, drugs – to

deal with the mind as well as the body, to satisfy women not only of any size but of any degree of desire. Vatsyayana’s words in such passages do not seem to reflect male anxiety at all; the women are depicted not as enormous monsters but as pliant and manipulatable sources of great pleasure. *Vive la différence*: because we are not animals, we can use culture – more precisely, the technique of the *Kamasutra* – to overcome our baser instincts, which must surely include male phallic anxiety.

But culture, in the *Kamasutra*’s sense, belonged to those who had leisure and means, time and money, none of which was in short supply for the text’s primary intended audience, an urban (and urbane) elite consisting of princes, high state officials, and wealthy merchants. The production of manuscripts, especially illuminated manuscripts, was necessarily an elite matter; men of wealth and power, kings and merchants, would commission texts of the *Kamasutra* to be copied out for their private use.

The protagonist of the *Kamasutra* is such a man. Literally a “man-about-town” (*nagaraka*, from the Sanskrit *nagara*, ‘city’), he lives “in a city, a capital city, a market town, or some large gathering where there are good people, or wherever he has to stay to make a living.” (1.4.2) He has, as we say of a certain type of man today, no visible source of income. Vatsyayana tells us, at the start of the section describing “The Lifestyle of the Man-about-Town,” that the playboy finances his lifestyle by “using the money that he has obtained from gifts, conquest, trade, or wages, or from inheritance, or from both.” (1.4.1) His companions may have quite realistic money problems (1.4.31 – 33); his wife is entrusted with all the household management, including the finances; and his mistresses work hard to make and keep their

money. But we never see the man-about-town at work:

This is how he spends a typical day. First is his morning toilet: He gets up in the morning, relieves himself, cleans his teeth, applies fragrant oils in small quantities, as well as incense, garlands, bees' wax and red lac, looks at his face in a mirror, takes some mouthwash, and attends to the things that need to be done. He bathes every day, has his limbs rubbed with oil every second day, a foam bath every third day, his face shaved every fourth day, and his body hair removed every fifth or tenth day. All of this is done without fail. And he continually cleans the sweat from his armpits. In the morning and afternoon he eats. (1.4.5 – 7)

Now, ready to face the day, he goes to work:

After eating, he passes the time teaching his parrots and mynah birds to speak; goes to quail-fights, cock-fights, and ram-fights; engages in various arts and games; and passes the time with his libertine, pander, and clown. And he takes a nap. In the late afternoon, he gets dressed up and goes to salons to amuse himself. And in the evening, there is music and singing. After that, on the bed in a bedroom carefully decorated and perfumed by sweet-smelling incense, he and his friends await the women who are slipping out for a rendezvous with them. He sends female messengers for them or goes to get them himself. And when the women arrive, he and his friends greet them with gentle conversation and courtesies that charm the mind and heart. If rain has soaked the clothing of women who have slipped out for a rendezvous in bad weather, he changes their clothes himself, or gets some of his friends to serve them. That is what he does by day and night. (1.4.8 – 13)

Busy teaching his birds to talk, he never drops in to check things at the shop, let alone visit his mother. Throughout the text, his one concern is the pursuit of pleasure.

That is not to say, however, that the pursuit of pleasure didn't require its own work. Vatsyayana details the sixty-four arts that need to be learned by anyone who is truly serious about pleasure:

singing; playing musical instruments; dancing; painting; cutting leaves into shapes; making lines on the floor with rice-powder and flowers; arranging flowers; coloring the teeth, clothes, and limbs; making jeweled floors; preparing beds; making music on the rims of glasses of water; playing water sports; unusual techniques; making garlands and stringing necklaces; making diadems and headbands; making costumes; making various earrings; mixing perfumes; putting on jewelry; doing conjuring tricks; practicing sorcery; sleight of hand; preparing various forms of vegetables, soups, and other things to eat; preparing wines, fruit juices, and other things to drink; needlework; weaving; playing the lute and the drum; telling jokes and riddles; completing words; reciting difficult words; reading aloud; staging plays and dialogues; completing verses; making things out of cloth, wood, and cane; wood-working; carpentry; architecture; the ability to test gold and silver; metallurgy; knowledge of the color and form of jewels; skill at nurturing trees; knowledge of ram fights, cockfights, and quail fights; teaching parrots and mynah birds to talk; skill at rubbing, massaging, and hairdressing; the ability to speak in sign language; understanding languages made to seem foreign; knowledge of local dialects; skill at making flower carts; knowledge of omens; alphabets for use in making magical diagrams; alphabets for memorizing; group

recitation; improvising poetry; dictionaries and thesauruses; knowledge of metre; literary work; the art of impersonation; the art of using clothes for disguise; special forms of gambling; the game of dice; children's games; etiquette; the science of strategy; and the cultivation of athletic skills. (1.3.15)

And while we are still reeling from this list, Vatsyayana immediately reminds us that there is, in addition, an entirely different cluster of sixty-four arts of love (1.3.16), which include eight forms of each of the main erotic activities: embracing, kissing, scratching, biting, sexual positions, moaning, the woman playing the man's part, and oral sex. (2.8.4 – 5) A rapid calculation brings the tab to 128 arts, a curriculum that one could hardly master even after the equivalent of two Ph.D.s and a long apprenticeship – and one that not many could afford.

So the lovers must be rich, yes, but not necessarily upper class. When the text says that the man may get his money from "gifts, conquest, trade, or wages, or from inheritance, or from both," the commentator explains, "If he is a Brahmin, he gets his money from gifts; a king or warrior, from conquest; a commoner, from trade; and a servant, from wages earned by working as an artisan, a traveling bard, or something of that sort." (1.4.1) Brahmin, warrior, commoner, and servant are the four basic classes, or *varnas*, of India. Indeed, the *Kamasutra* is almost unique in classical Sanskrit literature in its almost total disregard of caste, though of course power relations of many kinds – gender, wealth, political position, as well as caste – are implicit throughout the text. But *varna* is mentioned just twice, first in a single sentence admitting that it is of concern only when you marry a wife who will bear

you legal sons, and can be disregarded in all other erotic situations (1.5.1); and later in a passage about what we would call rough trade:

"Sex with a coarse servant" takes place with a lower-class female water-carrier or house-servant, until the climax; in this kind of sex, he does not bother with the acts of civility. Similarly, "sex with a peasant" takes place between a courtesan and a country bumpkin, until the climax, or between a man-about-town and women from the countryside, cow-herding villages, or countries beyond the borders. (2.10.22 – 25)

Vatsyayana disapproves of sexual relations with rural and tribal women because they could have adverse effects on the erotic refinement and sensibility of the cultivated man-about-town; he would have been baffled by any Lady Chatterji's sexual transports with a gamekeeper. But for all the rest of the world of pleasure, class is irrelevant. Where classical texts of Hindu social law might have said that you make love differently to women of high and low classes, Vatsyayana just says that you make love differently to women of delicate or rough temperaments. Size matters, and money matters, but status does not.

Two worlds intersect for us in the *Kamasutra*: sex and ancient India. We assume that the understanding of sex will be familiar to us, since sex is universal, and that the representations of ancient India will be strange to us, since that world existed long ago and in a galaxy far away. This is largely the case, but there are interesting reversals of expectations: some sexual matters are strange (for, as you will recall, Vatsyayana argues that sex for human beings is a matter of culture not nature), or even sometimes repugnant to us, while some cultural

matters are strangely familiar or, if unfamiliar, still charming and comprehensible, reassuring us that the people of ancient India took their trousers off one leg at a time, just like us. Consider the description of the man's day: his morning toilet is much like ours, but we do not, alas, schedule in things like teaching mynah birds to speak. It is the constant intersection of these perceptions – "How very odd!" "Oh, I know just how she feels." "How can anyone do that?" "Ah, I remember doing that once, years ago." – that constitutes the strange appeal of the *Kamasutra*.

Take the matter of male anxiety about penis size and its prevalence on the Internet – a link between us and them. The *Kamasutra* tackles the problem aggressively:

The people of the South pierce a boy's penis just like his ears. A young man has it cut with a knife and then stands in water as long as the blood flows. To keep the opening clear, he has sexual intercourse that very night, continuously. Then, after an interval of one day, he cleans the opening with astringent decoctions. He enlarges it by putting larger and larger spears of reeds and ivory-tree wood in it, and he cleans it with a piece of sugar-cane coated with honey. After that, he enlarges it by inserting a tube of lead with a protruding knot on the end, and he lubricates it with the oil of the marking-nut. He inserts into the enlarged opening sex tools made in various shapes. They must be able to bear a lot of use, and may be soft or rough according to individual preferences. (7.2.14 – 24)

And if that doesn't work, try this:

Rub your penis with the bristles of insects born in trees, then massage it with oil for ten nights, then rub it again and massage it again. When it swells up as the result

of this treatment, lie down on a cot with your face down and let your penis hang down from a hole in the cot. Then you may assuage the pain with cool astringents and, by stages, finish the treatment. This swelling, which lasts for a lifetime, is the one that voluptuaries call "prickled." (7.2.25 – 27)

Granted, I have chosen extreme surgical examples, but the pharmaceutical recommendations, though less grotesque, are hardly more practical:

If you coat your penis with an ointment made with powdered white thorn-apple, black pepper, and long pepper, mixed with honey, you put your sexual partner in your power. If you pulverize a female "circle-maker" buzzard that died a natural death, and mix the powder with honey and gooseberry; or if you cut the knotty roots of the milkwort and milk-hedge plants into pieces, coat them with a powder of red arsenic and sulfur, dry and pulverize the mixture seven times, mix it with honey, and spread it on your penis, you put your sexual partner in your power. (7.1.25, 27, 28)

The commentator's comment on this – "Do this in such a way that the woman you want does not realize, 'A man with something spread on his penis is making love to me'" – has inspired at least one reader to remark, "Any woman who would let you make love to her with all that stuff smeared on you would have to be madly in love with you already." Passages like this make us think, as a Victorian gentleman cited by Hilaire Belloc remarked after seeing Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, "How different, how very different, from the home life of our own dear Queen."

But we may also recognize, and admire, the precision with which Vatsyayana tells us how to detect when a

woman has reached a climax (or, perhaps, if we assume, as I think we should, that the text is intended for women, too, he is telling the woman how to fake it):

The signs that a woman is reaching her climax are that her limbs become limp, her eyes close, she loses all sense of shame, and she takes him deeper and deeper inside her. She flails her hands about, sweats, bites, will not let him get up, kicks him, and continues to move over the man even after he has finished making love. (2.8.17–18)

He also knew about what we call the G-spot (after the German gynecologist Ernst Graefenberg): "When her eyes roll when she feels him in certain spots, he presses her in just those spots." (1.8.16) Vatsyayana quotes a predecessor who said, "This is the secret of young women" – and, indeed, it remained a secret in Europe until well into the 1980s.

Contrary to expectation, there are moments of recognition in the realm of culture, too. There is the passage in which the boy teases the girl when they are swimming together, diving down and coming up near her, touching her, and then diving down again. (3.4.6) This was already an old trick when I was a young girl at summer camp in the Adirondacks. European readers must surely also recognize the man who tells the woman on whom he's set his sights "about an erotic dream, pretending that it was about another woman" (3.4.9), and the woman who does the same thing. (5.4.54) I felt a guilty pang of familiarity when I read the passage suggesting that a woman interested in getting a man's attention in a crowded room might find some pretext to take something from him, making sure to brush him with her breast as she reaches across him. (2.2.8–9) This is an amazingly intimate thing to know about a culture, far more intimate than know-

ing that you can stand on one leg or another when you make love.

Sometimes the unfamiliar and the familiar are cheek by jowl: the culture-specific list of women the wife must not associate with, which include a Buddhist nun and a magician who uses love-sorcery worked with roots (4.1.9), is followed in the very next passage by the woman who is cooking for her man and finds out "this is what he likes, this is what he hates, this is good for him, this is bad for him," a consideration that must resonate with many contemporary readers.

One part of the text that surely speaks to the modern reader is the advice on ways to seduce a married woman. In the would-be adulterer's meditations on reasons to do this, there are self-deceptive arguments that still make sense in our world:

"There is no danger involved in my having this woman, and there is a chance of wealth. And since I am useless, I have exhausted all means of making a living. Such as I am, I will get a lot of money from her in this way, with very little trouble." Or, "This woman is madly in love with me and knows all my weaknesses. If I reject her, she will ruin me by publicly exposing my faults; or she will accuse me of some fault which I do not in fact have, but which will be easy to believe of me and hard to clear myself of, and this will be the ruin of me." (1.5.12–14)

Meanwhile, another passage brilliantly imagines the resistance of a woman who is tempted to commit adultery, in ways that rival the psychologizing of John Updike and Gustave Flaubert:

She gets angry and thinks, "He is propositioning me in an insulting way"; or she fears, "He will soon go away. There is no future in it; his thoughts are attached to

someone else"; or she is nervous, thinking, "He does not conceal his signals"; or she fears, "His advances are just a tease"; or she is diffident, thinking, "How glamorous he is"; or she becomes shy when she thinks, "He is a man-about-town, accomplished in all the arts"; or she feels, "He has always treated me just as a friend"; or she cannot bear him, thinking, "He does not know the right time and place," or she does not respect him, thinking, "He is an object of contempt"; or she despises him when she thinks, "Even though I have given him signals, he does not understand"; or she feels sympathy for him and thinks, "I would not want anything unpleasant to happen to him because of me"; or she becomes depressed when she sees her own shortcomings, or afraid when she thinks, "If I am discovered, my own people will throw me out"; or scornful, thinking, "He has gray hair"; or she worries, "My husband has employed him to test me"; or she has regard for morality. (5.1.23, 25, 26, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 37 - 41)

The woman's thoughts on such subjects as how to get a lover and how to tell when he is cooling toward her also ring remarkably true in the twenty-first century. My favorite is the passage on the devious devices that a woman can use to make her lover leave her, rather than simply kicking him out:

She does for him what he does not want, and she does repeatedly what he has criticized. She talks about things he does not know about. She shows no amazement, but only contempt, for the things he does know about. She intentionally distorts the meaning of what he says. She laughs when he has not made a joke, and when he has made a joke, she laughs about something else. When he is talking, she looks at her entourage with sidelong glances and slaps them. And when she has interrupted his story, she tells other stories. She talks in

public about the bad habits and vices that he cannot give up. She asks for things that should not be asked for. She punctures his pride. She ignores him. She criticizes men who have the same faults. And she stalls when they are alone together. And at the end, the release happens of itself. (6.3.39 - 44)

A little inside joke that does not survive the cross-cultural translation is the word used for 'release,' *moksha*, which generally refers to a person's spiritual release from the world of transmigration; there may be an intended irony in its use here to designate the release of a man from a woman's thrall. The rest comes through loud and clear, however: the woman employs what some would call passive-aggressive behavior to indicate that it is time to hit the road, Jack. There is no male equivalent for this passage, presumably because a man would not have to resort to such subterfuges: he would just throw the woman out. This, too, has not changed very much.

Our reaction to the central subject, the act of love, should surely be one of recognition, of familiarity, but no. Here, rather than in the cultural setting, is where we are, unexpectedly, brought up short by the unfamiliar. The *Kamasutra* describes a number of contortions that "require practice," as the text puts it mildly, and these are the positions that generally make people laugh out loud at the mention of the *Kamasutra*. Reviews of books dealing with the *Kamasutra* in recent years have had titles like "Assume the Position" and *Position Impossible*. A recent cartoon depicts "The *Kamasutra* Relaxasizer Lounger, 165 positions."⁴

4 Mr. Boffo cartoon by Joe Martin, Inc., distributed by Universal Press Syndicate; published in the *Chicago Tribune*, September 29, 2000. A salesman is saying to a customer, "Most people just buy it to get the catalogue."

Cosmopolitan magazine published two editions of its "Cosmo *Kamasutra*," offering "12 brand-new mattress-quaking sex styles," each with its numerical "degree of difficulty," including positions called "the backstairs boogie," "the octopus," "the mermaid," "the spider web," and "the rock'n' roll."⁵ There is a *Kamasutra* wristwatch that displays a different position every hour. A recent Roz Chast cartoon entitled "The Kama Sutra of Grilled Cheese" included the following menu:

#14: The Righteous Lion. With a firm but loving hand, guide your cheese to a slice of bread. Top with another slice of bread, and place on hot, well-lubricated griddle. Fry until bread and cheese become one.
#39: Buddha in Paradise: When the time is right, position your cheese atop a slice of bread. Run under the broiler until the cheese yields up its life force and is transformed.
#58: The Lotus: While your cheese is melting in the microwave, your bread should be toasting in the toaster. If all goes well, both will arrive at the crucial stage simultaneously, and can be united.
Next Week: The Kama Sutra of Peanut Butter and Jelly.⁶

The satirical journal *The Onion* ran a parody about a couple whose "inability to execute The Totally Auspicious Position, along with countless other ancient Indian erotic positions, took them to new heights of sexual dissatisfaction."⁷ The authors of these jokes had in mind positions like ones that Vatsyayana attributes to his rival Suvarnanabha:

5 "The Cosmo *Kamasutra*," *Cosmopolitan*, September 1998; "The Cosmo *Kamasutra*, #2," *Cosmopolitan*, September 1999, 256–259.

6 *The New Yorker*, September 10, 2001, 78.

7 "Tantric Sex Class Opens Up Whole New World of Unfulfillment for Local Couple," *The Onion*, March 30–April 5, 2000, 8.

Now for those of Suvarnanabha: When both thighs of the woman are raised, it is called the "curve." When the man holds her legs up, it is the "yawn." When he does that but also flexes her legs at the knees, it is the "high-squeeze." When he does that but stretches out one of her feet, it is the "half-squeeze." When one of her feet is placed on the man's shoulder and the other is stretched out, and they alternate again and again, this is called "splitting the bamboo." When one of her legs is raised above her head and the other leg is stretched out, it is called "impaling on a stake," and can only be done with practice. When both of her legs are flexed at the knees and placed on her own abdomen, it is the "crab." When her thighs are raised and crossed, it is the "squeeze." When she opens her knees and crosses her calves, it is the "lotus seat." When he turns around with his back to her, and she embraces his back, that is called "rotating," and can only be done with practice. (2.6.23–33)

Clearly, even Vatsyayana regards these as over the top, which is why he blames them on someone else. What are we to make of these gymnastics? Did people in ancient India really make love like that? I think not. True, they did have yoga, and great practitioners of yoga can make their bodies do things that most of us would not think possible (or even, perhaps, desirable). But just because one *can* do it is no reason that one *should* do it. (Or, as Vatsyayana remarks at the end of his *Viagra* passage, "The statement that 'There is a text for this' does not justify a practice." [7.2.55]). I think the answer lies elsewhere: "Vatsyayana says: Even passion demands variety. And it is through variety that partners inspire passion in one another. It is their infinite variety that makes courtesans and their lovers remain desirable to one another.

Even in archery and in other martial arts, the textbooks insist on variety. How much more is this true of sex!" (2.4.25)

The user's-manual approach does not account for positions that do not invite imitation. These may simply be the artist's free-ranging fantasies on a theme of sexual possibilities: they are not instructive but inspiring, and inspired. They represent a literally no-holds-barred exploration of the theoretical possibilities of human heterosexual coupling, much as the profusion of compound animals – heads of ducks on bodies of lions, or torsos of women on the bodies of fish, and so forth – pushed back the walls of our imagination of the variety of known and unknown animal species. It is a fantasy literature, an artistic and imaginative, rather than physical or sexual, exploration of coupling. Since there is nothing like this in the Western tradition, it strikes us as weird in the same way that the passage about enlarging the penis boggles our imagination.

But when compared to European pornography, this is, after all, mild stuff. There is no discussion of everyday topics of many European publications, such as bondage or golden showers. The text is, rather, a virtual sexual *pas de deux* as Balanchine might have choreographed it, an extended meditation on some of the ways that a naked man and a naked woman (or, rarely, several men and/or women) might move their limbs while making love. It depicts an idealized world of sex that is the antecedent of Erica Jong's "zipless fuck" or the capitalist fantasies of Hugh Hefner's glossy Playboy empire. And though sexual reality may in fact be universal – there are, after all, just so many places that you can put your genitals – sexual fantasy seems to be highly cultural. This, then, is what is new to us in the brave new world of these ancient images.



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Author(s): Leonard Zwillling and Michael J. Sweet

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“Like a City Ablaze”: The Third Sex and the Creation of Sexuality in Jain Religious Literature

LEONARD ZWILLING

Department of English
University of Wisconsin—Madison

MICHAEL J. SWEET

Department of Psychiatry
University of Wisconsin—Madison

THE PROPOSITION THAT sexuality *tout court*, freed from the excess baggage of social status, gender role, and other factors, was uniquely constructed in the modern West, has been central to the young discipline of the history of sexuality, and has been tenaciously defended by most of its practitioners.¹ This notion of sexuality, often labeled as “constructionist,” has been defined by David Halperin as implying that “human beings are individuated on the level of their sexuality, that they differ from one another in their sexuality and, indeed, belong to different types or kinds of being by virtue of their sexuality.”² Halperin states elsewhere

An earlier version of this article was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Boston, March 1994. We wish to thank Wendy Doniger, Stephen Collins, and the other panel members and audience participants for their stimulating and helpful comments at that time. We also wish to thank John Cort, Paul Dundas, and George Talbot, as well as the two anonymous reviewers for *JHS*, for their valuable ideas and suggestions. All translations are by us, unless otherwise noted. Jain terminology is generally given in its Sanskrit form rather than in Prakrit for easier comparative purposes by Indologists; some direct quotations are given in Prakrit. Jain texts are referred to by the abbreviations in Jagdishchandra Jain, *Life in Ancient India as Depicted in the Jain Canon and Commentaries*, 2d ed. (New Delhi, 1984), pp. xxi–xxiii.

¹See representative statements of this position in David F. Greenberg, *The Social Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago, 1988), pp. 397–488; David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (New York, 1990), pp. 15–40; and John J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire* (New York, 1990), pp. 3–4. The locus classicus for this view is found in Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, vol. 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1978), pp. 42–43.

²David M. Halperin, “Is There a History of Sexuality?” in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Harry Ablove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York, 1993), p. 417.

that prior to the writings of Freud and Havelock Ellis it “never seemed to have entered anyone’s head [that] sexual object choice might be wholly independent of such ‘secondary’ characteristics as masculinity or femininity.”³

There are several counterexamples to the constructionist thesis that can be drawn from premodern and non-Western cultures. On closer examination, however, most of them are subject to alternative interpretations. For example, the literature of Western classical antiquity contains numerous descriptions of a class of males at least partly defined by their sexual behavior, the Greco-Roman *cinaedus*.⁴ However, the *cinaedus*’s connection with nonnormative gender and social roles may rule it out as strong evidence for the autonomous existence of sexuality in the premodern world. The classical Western medical literature also recognizes categories of persons held to be physiologically and/or psychologically distinct from the norm, some of whom are distinguished primarily on the basis of their preferred sexual practices.⁵ However, the association of such figures as the *mollis* to the female gender role could raise the objection that sexuality in the modern sense is not what is being described in these texts.⁶ A more promising line of enquiry may be on Hellenistic astrological texts, which do posit innate, permanent sexual orientations and inclinations based on astrological factors and thus are not necessarily bound up with gender role or physiology.⁷ Early modern Europeans may also have had the concept of a sexual “nature,” but this is later than the period in question.⁸

³ Halperin, *One Hundred Years*, p. 16.

⁴ On the *cinaedus* (*kinaidos* in Greek) see Amy Richlin, “Not before Homosexuality: The Materiality of the *Cinaedus* and the Roman Law against Love between Men,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3 (1993): 523–73, as well as her *Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Ancient Rome*, rev. ed. (New York, 1992).

⁵ Essentialist views on male receptive sexuality were expressed by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1150.12–16, and in a much later work ascribed to him, the *Problemata Physica* 897b1–14, 28, 880a5. On the psychopathology of the anal-receptive, cross-dressing *mollis* (equivalent to the *cinaedus*) see Caelius Aurelianus, *On Acute Diseases and on Chronic Diseases*, trans. I. E. Drabkin (Chicago, 1950), pp. 901–5.

⁶ This is in fact the argument made by Halperin, *One Hundred Years*, pp. 21–24, in his analysis of Caelius Aurelianus.

⁷ Eugene Rice, “Ancient Origins of Modern Homophobia” (lecture delivered at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee, March 23, 1995). On this subject see John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago, 1981), p. 52, n. 28; Giuseppe Bezza, *Commento al Primo Libro della Tetrabiblos di Claudio Tolomeo* (Milan, 1990), p. 92; Julius Firmicus Maternus, *Ancient Astrology: Theory and Practice*, trans. Jean Rhys Bram (Park Ridge, IL, 1975), pp. 207–8, 210, 214, 218, 248–49.

⁸ See the argument concerning the appeals to a hermaphrodite’s nature, in the sense of attraction to one sex or the other, in deciding his/her “true” sex, in Lorraine Daston and

Turning to Asia, we find that in the Indian medical tradition, which is not central to the Jain texts that form the central focus of this article, the main criterion for membership in alternative sex/gender categories is the lack or nonexercise of procreative or generative capacity, and not sexual practices or desires per se.⁹ In Japan, writers in the Tokugawa era (1600–1868) held that there existed a class of men with exclusively same-sex interest, the *onna-girai*, or woman-haters.¹⁰ This has been largely ignored in discussions of the evolution of sexuality, possibly for two main reasons: the general lack of awareness of, or interest in, non-Western data by historians of sexuality¹¹ and the fact that the Japanese took this concept for granted, as the reflection of a contemporary social reality, without hazarding any theoretical explanations of it.

It is among the Jains that we have more definitely identified a premodern delineation of a concept of sexuality in something approaching its modern sense. The Jains are an important Indian minority religious community with a history of over twenty-five hundred years and a vast literature in Sanskrit and other Indic languages that has, until recently, been little known in the West except to a small number of specialists.¹² Because they shared the pan-Indian acceptance of a third sex, the Jains, like many other Indian schools of thought, were led to speculate on what the nature (*svabhāva*) of such a third-sex person might be, as compared to that of a man or a woman. As it turned out, the residual or even redundant category of a third sex served as a focal point for speculations that ultimately resulted in the formation of an autonomous idea of sexu-

Katherine Park, "The Hermaphrodite and the Orders of Nature: Sexual Ambiguity in Early Modern France," *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 1 (1995): 519–38.

⁹On the Indian medical literature see Michael J. Sweet and Leonard Zwilling, "The First Medicalization: The Taxonomy and Etiology of Queerness in Classical Indian Medicine," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3 (1993): 590–607. On the criteria for membership in the third-sex categories see pp. 592–94.

¹⁰See Ihara Saikaku, *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, trans. Paul G. Schalow (Stanford, CA, 1990), p. 4.

¹¹Sweet and Zwilling, p. 591, n. 4.

¹²The best general introduction to the Jain religion, in its historical and social as well as doctrinal aspects, is Paul Dundas, *The Jains* (London, 1992); Padmanabh S. Jaini's landmark *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Delhi, 1979) gives a more detailed account of Jain writings and doctrines. We here use the contemporary form "Jain" rather than the Sanskrit "Jaina" found in many Indological writings. There are somewhat over three million Jains in India today, mainly concentrated in Western India, in the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Karnataka (Dundas, p. 3). Jainism has survived uninterruptedly in India since the fifth century B.C.E., unlike Buddhism, its contemporary or slightly younger cognate mendicant (*śramana*) movement; for speculations on the reasons for this, see Padmanabh S. Jaini, "The Disappearance of Buddhism and the Survival of Jainism," in *Studies in the History of Buddhism*, ed. A. K. Narain (Delhi, 1980).

ality. The primary objective of this article is to demonstrate that Jain thinkers, living and writing long before the modern era and in a socio-cultural context very different from our own, developed a full-fledged conception of sexuality that meets the criteria cited above, a sexuality that is often, but not invariably, linked to gender nonconformity and biological sex.

THE THIRD SEX

The acceptance of the category of a third sex has been a part of the Indian worldview for nearly three thousand years. The concept took form during the late Vedic period (eighth to sixth centuries B.C.E.) on the basis of observed male gender-role nonconformity. Men who were impotent, did not impregnate women, were effeminate, or transvestite, were regarded as *napuṃsaka*, literally "not-a-male," that is, unmale. Such unmales constituted a distinct though stigmatized social group, with institutionalized roles as practitioners of traditionally female occupations: singers, dancers, and later, prostitutes.¹³ The adoption of *napuṃsaka* as the technical term for the third grammatical gender circa the sixth century B.C.E.¹⁴ may be regarded as signaling the acceptance of the unmale as a true third sex.¹⁵ However, as a grammatical term, *napuṃsaka* was interpreted to mean "neither male nor female," and this interpretation was now applied to those persons who were previously viewed as being males not conforming to gender-role expectations, resulting in their being regarded as persons of ambiguous sex. This element of ambiguity was to play a role in the later Jain conception of third-sex sexuality. In addition, by the beginning of the common era the third sex, like the two other sexes, was held to be determined at conception by purely biological causes, and it is quite possible that it was among the schools of traditional medicine that a term actually meaning "third sex" was introduced.¹⁶ This term, *trītyāprakṛti*, literally "third basic

¹³For a review of cross-dressing and transsexualism in epic and religious literature interpreted from a psychoanalytic perspective, see Robert P. Goldman, "Transsexualism, Gender, and Anxiety in Traditional India," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113 (1993): 374–401. See also Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago, 1980), pp. 297–334.

¹⁴*Sātapatha Brāhmaṇa* (ŚB) 10.5.1.2–3.

¹⁵These are some of the conclusions reached in our paper on the early formation of the third-sex concept, currently being prepared for publication.

¹⁶Sex is held to be determined at the time of conception, dependent on the predominance of either the father's seed or the mother's blood, in which case the child will be either male or female, respectively. When blood and seed are in equilibrium there will be birth as a *napuṃsaka*. The notion of the third sex as an equilibrium is expressed in the belief that

form,"¹⁷ would appear to have gained universal acceptance by the fourth century, when it is found included in the standard classical thesaurus as an equivalent for *napuṃsaka*.¹⁸ As early as the fifth century C.E. the Jains themselves had used such terms as *tr̥tiya* ("third") and *trairāśika* ("third heap," after an archaic Jain heresy) to refer to persons of the third sex.¹⁹ The class of transvestite singers, dancers, and prostitutes known as *hijras* are the contemporary representatives of the unmales and third sex of earlier times.²⁰

A number of the more important schools of classical Indian thought have discussed the third sex to some extent, the Jains more thoroughly than most. Emerging immediately after the late Vedic period (800–600 B.C.E.), the Jains, although heterodox, inherited not only the conception of a third sex, but also a set of terms for referring to the members of that class. In addition to the aforementioned *napuṃsaka*, there is also the *klība*, or the sexually defective man²¹ and the *paṇḍaka*, perhaps originally

the third-sex fetus develops in the center of the womb, rather than on the right or left sides as with males or females. For a summary of the Jain sources that treat conception and embryology see Walther Schubring, *The Doctrine of the Jainas Described after the Oldest Sources* (New Delhi, 1962), pp. 141–42, as well as the same author's *Tanḍulaveyāliya: Ein Painṇaya des Jaina-Siddhānta: Textausgabe, Analyse und Erklärung* (Mainz, 1965). The Jain view is essentially identical to that of the traditional Indian medical system (*āyurveda*) and was very likely a part of the common body of third-sex lore; see Sweet and Zwilling, pp. 594–97. Third-sex persons are held to be anatomically different from both men and women in certain minor ways, though they are closer to the latter, in harmony with the general view of the third sex as a feminized, unmanly male; e.g., men have 700 veins and 500 muscles; women, 670 veins and 470 muscles; *napuṃsakas* (here called *paṇḍaga*), 680 veins and 480 muscles; see Schubring, *Doctrine*, p. 143. An association of the right side with a male child, and the left with a female was also made by the Greeks and the Chinese; see Hanns Oertel, "Contributions from the Jāiminiya Brāhmaṇa to the History of the Brāhmaṇa Literature," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 26 (1905): 190.

¹⁷ *Caraka* 4.2.25b. It should also be noted that *prakṛti* can often be translated as "nature," as in the case of its derivative *prākṛta* for "natural language" in contrast to *saṃskṛta*, artificial or literary language. This suggests that the third sex, along with the other two sexes, was regarded as a natural category in India.

¹⁸ *Amarakośa* 2.6.39. On the date of this work, see A. A. Ramanathan, ed., *Amarakośa* (Madras, 1971), p. xxi.

¹⁹ For *trairāśika* (Prakrit *terāsi*) see, e.g., the list of forty unfit donors at *Piṇḍa* 572–77; *Nisī Bhā* 5217; *Brh Bhā* 2572, 2575; for *tr̥tiya* (Prakrit *tatia*) see *Nisī Cū* 3564; *Brh Bhā* 5170.

²⁰ The most complete study of the *hijras* to date is Serena Nanda, *Neither Man nor Woman: The Hijras of India* (Belmont, CA, 1990). See also ethnographic accounts in G. Morris Carstairs, *The Twice Born: A Study of a Community of High Caste Hindus* (Bloomington, IN, 1967), pp. 59–61; and James Freeman, *Untouchable: An Indian Life History* (Stanford, CA, 1979), pp. 294–315.

²¹ The nature of the *klība*'s defect is suggested by the later *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 6.1.12; "*klības* not procreating with semen" (*klībā aprajāyamānā retasā*). The sexual na-

meaning "impotent" or "sterile," both of whom are associated with transvestism and dancing.²²

Beginning as a movement of wandering ascetics, and becoming in time a powerful, monastically based religious community, Jainism had a strong practical interest in controlling the sexuality of its monks and nuns. In common with most other Indian renunciant movements, Jain ascetics were normatively celibate, and the prestige and power of the Jain community partially depended on public confidence in the "purity" of the Jain monks and nuns. Those of the third sex could not be ignored either as "insiders," which led to discussions of their status as monks or lay followers, or as "outsiders," members of the society at large with which Jain ascetics had to interact. Thus, we find that it is in the treatises of monastic jurisprudence that such questions are examined in the exhaustive and luxuriant detail at which Jain scholiasts excel, even by the standards of the highly analytical Indian scholastic literature in general. It is largely from these texts that we get a picture of third-sex persons as a social reality, a facet of Indian life almost completely ignored by cultural historians of ancient India.

In addition to the purely practical interests that motivated monastic law, the Jains also had a deep theoretical concern with sexological matters, because it was the very definitions of the sexes themselves that lay at the heart of one of the most important of the intra-Jain debates: whether or not women can attain spiritual liberation (*mokṣa*).²³ It is their difference of opinion on this point (as well as a few others) that doctrinally divides the two major Jain orders, the Śvetāmbara and the Digambara.²⁴ Since the controversy hinges on the identification of the quality or sign necessary to designate a person as a woman, such an inquiry by necessity involved an examination of what it meant to be male, and nei-

ture of the *klība*'s defect is accepted by all the developed Indian traditions. *Klība*-hood may be an acquired condition as, e.g., when the penis is destroyed by fire, as in *ŚB* 1.4.3.19.

²² *Atharva Veda* (AV) 8.6.7, 11.16. The etymology of *paṇḍaka* is unknown, but cf. *banda* at AV 7.65.3 glossed by the commentator as *nirvīrya* ("impotent").

²³ The only previous study of gender in Jain texts is Padmanabh S. Jaini's valuable and detailed *Gender and Salvation* (Berkeley, 1991), which focuses on the intra-Jain controversy over the spiritual liberation (*mokṣa*) of women. Paul Dundas (letter to Leonard Zwillling and Michael J. Sweet, July 17, 1995) is of the opinion that this controversy was a "spinoff from the more central question of ascetic nudity" and did not become important until the medieval period, beginning around the sixth or seventh century C.E.

²⁴ The Śvetāmbaras, or White-Clad, are so called because of the white robes worn by their mendicants; the Digambara, or Sky-Clad, hold that nudity is the rule for those males who seek final enlightenment, and that women are debarred from the highest spiritual accomplishments. See Dundas (n. 12 above), pp. 40–52, for the history and delineation of sectarian differences.

ther male nor female, as well. It is for both these pragmatic and theoretical reasons that Jain literature constitutes perhaps the single richest source for knowledge of the third sex, as well as for speculations on sex and gender, to be found in India from the ancient to medieval periods.

SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Indian speculation on the characteristics by which a person can be identified as belonging to one of the three sexes arose in the context of examining the relationship between natural gender or sex, and grammatical gender. It will be recalled that the adoption of the term *napuṃsaka* involved the interpretation "neither male nor female"; this is the view that formed the background for inquiry into natural and grammatical gender and led to some of the difficulties that were later to emerge. Among those who were considered neither male nor female was the "long haired man" (*keśavan*), and the aforementioned sexually defective, impotent man. Although both are recognized as males, and hence not females, their gender role nonconformity expressed in long hair and impotence assimilates them to females—thus, they are not truly males.²⁵ From this we can conclude that early on long hair was a recognized marker for a woman, and potency for a man; thus, the presence of the former or absence of the latter in a male were the two distinct signifiers of third-sex membership. What is foreshadowed here are the two basic views promulgated by the Brahmanical (i.e., "Hindu") schools concerning the essential markers for sex assignment.

The exploration of the relationship between natural and grammatical gender was based on two assumptions: that gender is a property belonging to objects, and that objects, as well as persons, are gendered by the presence or absence of certain defining characteristics. This intimate connection between sex and grammatical gender is expressed by the fact that the word *liṅga*, or sex,²⁶ was adopted as the technical term for grammatical gender, a move that precipitated much confusion and complexity. By the third century B.C.E. two views had developed about the characteristics that define gender: the first view, which is anticipated by the gender analysis of the long-haired man, is that gender is characterized by the presence or absence of the primary and secondary sexual characteris-

²⁵Technically, in this early discussion, the third sex is distinguished as "neither female nor male," and so the unmale was seen as not male because of his long hair, but also not female because of his maleness in other respects. Similarly, his impotence was the mark of his nonmaleness, but, like the long-haired man, he still was not a female, on account of his other masculine characteristics.

²⁶The original sense of *liṅga* is "characteristic mark or sign" (*Nirukta* 1.17); later on it comes to mean "sexual characteristic" in general, and "penis" in particular.

tics.²⁷ The second view, anticipated by the analysis of the sexually defective man, is that gender assignment is based on the presence or absence of procreative or conceptive ability. Both views, however, were criticized and rejected by the Jains on the grounds that they were inadequate to determine sex, as we shall show below in discussing their handling of the relationship between biological sex, gender role, and sexuality (pp. 374–76).

As for the Buddhists, their position most closely approximates that of the first of the Brahmanical views, that is, that the sexes are distinguished on the basis of the primary and secondary sexual characteristics.²⁸ Although the third sex is not explicitly treated as a distinct class of persons in Buddhist literature, a number of recognized third sex types are discussed, some of whom are defined in terms of their sexual, specifically homosexual, behavior and not on the basis of their possession or non-possession of certain external characteristics.²⁹ The Jains found the above views wanting, and went beyond the mere citation of sexual behavior as a marker of sex in the case of the third-sex subtypes, looking instead at an underlying sexuality motivating the sexual behavior of all the sexes. While such a conception of sexuality most probably does not belong to the oldest strata of Jain doctrine it is certainly quite old, since it is accepted by both major sectarian divisions and thus most probably antedates their schism in the early centuries of the present era.³⁰

While the Jains inherited the basic concept of three sexes, they did not, at least in the canonical literature, use the standard term *liṅga* for biological sex (with one noteworthy exception) or even for grammatical gender³¹

²⁷ This position is presented straightforwardly in the third-century B.C.E. linguistic classic, *Mahābhāṣya* (*The Great Commentary*) 4.1.3: “[Q:] What is it that people see when they decide, this is a woman, this is a man, this is neither a woman nor a man? [A:] That person who has breasts and long hair is a woman; that person who is hairy all over is a man; that person who is different from either when those characteristics are absent, is neither woman nor man [*napuṃśaka*].”

²⁸ *Abhidharma Kośa* IV.14 c. Here the author glosses *liṅga* by its synonym *vyāñjana*. *Vyāñjana*, sexual characteristic or sex organ, it is worthwhile pointing out, is cognate with *vyakti*, which, like *liṅga*, is employed in the grammatical literature in the sense of grammatical gender, again pointing to a basic belief in a connection between natural sex and grammatical gender.

²⁹ See Leonard Zwilling, “Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts,” in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. José Cabezon (Albany, NY, 1992), pp. 204–6.

³⁰ See Dundas, pp. 40–44.

³¹ In the discussion of language, including grammatical gender, see *Paṇṇa* 832–57 in *Prajñāpanāsūtram* (Bombay, 1969–71); similarly in *Thā* 113, in *Shānāṅgasūtram* and *Samavāyāṅgasūtram* (Delhi, 1985); and *Ācā* in *Ācārāṅgasūtra* and *Sūtrakṛtāṅgasūtra* (Delhi, 1985). The *Ācā[raṅgasūtra]* is available in the translation by Hermann Jacobi in *Jaina Sutras*, vol. 22 of *The Sacred Books of the East* (Oxford, 1882; reprint, New Delhi, 1964).

but retained a rather concrete portion of the original sense of this word and applied it only to the external insignia or paraphernalia that were held to be characteristic of Jain mendicants, non-Jain mendicants, or lay-people.³² In place of *liṅga* they introduced their own term, *veda*.³³

Veda (like *liṅga*) was used in more than one sense; in addition to meaning physical sex, it also refers to a psychological state (*bhāva*). It is this aspect that, following a traditional etymology, we translate as "feeling," that is, sexual feeling or sexuality.³⁴ *Veda*, as sexual feeling, frequently appears in later canonical literature where the three types of sexuality—male, female, and third sex—were already recognized as distinct entities by their assignment as three of the nine subsidiary passions (*nokaṣāya*).³⁵ Nevertheless, it is explicitly viewed as sexuality in only a single passage in the canonical literature where male sexuality (*puru-*

³² Compare *Uttarā* 20.43, 23.32, 29.42, in *Daśavaikālika Sūtra*, *Uttarādhyāyana Sūtra*, *Āvaśyaka Sūtra* (Bombay, 1977); also *Pañña* 1.16 where the emblems of the Jain mendicant, non-Jain mendicant, and householder are called *svaṅga*, *aṅga*, and *grhi*. For the Śvetāmbaras, *liṅga*, as we have already seen above, is used to refer to the characteristic marks of religious practitioners or laymen, where, e.g., the *dravyaliṅga* or material sign of a Jain ascetic will be his whisk broom, mouth cover, etc., and the *bhāvaliṅga* or psychological sign, his religious vows; see Nathmal Tatia, *Aspects of Jaina Monasticism* (Ladnun, 1981), p. 67. For more on the *dravyaliṅga* and *bhāvaliṅga* see n. 59 below. A still useful, and readily available, translation of the *Uttarā*[dhyāyana Sūtra] is that by Hermann Jacobi in *Jaina Sutras*, vol. 45 of *The Sacred Books of the East* (Oxford, 1900; reprint, New Delhi, 1964).

³³ The adoption of *veda* as a technical term for sexuality could be construed as a stunning insult to the Brahmins, for whom it meant sacred knowledge and scripture. This is in keeping with the Jain revalorization of other Brahmanical terms, such as *puṅgava* to mean "matter" rather than "person," or *dharma* to mean "motion" rather than "religious duty." Such revalorization can be seen as being of a piece with the Jains' satirical revisions and reworkings of the Hindu epics and sacred histories (*purāṇas*); see Dundas, pp. 201–6.

³⁴ On *veda* as feeling see Śīlāṅkācārya on *Sūya* 1.2.1. For *veda* in the sense of biological sex, cf., e.g., *Sama* 156. Here the distribution of the three sexes as found among the various orders of living things is presented; e.g., hell dwellers are *napuṃsaka*, i.e., sexless, only; demigods (*asura*) are male and female only; humans and other five-sensed, womb-born animals, are of three sexes, etc. However, it should be noted that in other places where the distribution of the sexes is treated they are referred to simply as male (*puruṣa*), female (*strī*), or neither (*napuṃsaka*), as in the second chapter of the *Jivā* in *Uvaṅgasuttāni* (Ladnun, 1987). A translation of *Sūya*, i.e., *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, is available in vol. 45 of *The Sacred Books of the East*.

³⁵ Strictly speaking, in the Jain system *veda* is a type of *karma*, i.e., a form of subtle matter (for non-Jains the basic meaning of *karma* is "action"). This matter, through the performance of certain actions, comes to adhere to the soul. When this *karma* is activated, it manifests in the form of sexual desire. As a type of *karma* see *Uttarā* 29.7 where the three *vedas* are explicitly recognized as such when added to the list of *nokaṣāyas*. At *Pañña* 1691 and *Thā* 9.3.700 the list of *nokaṣāyas* begins with the three *vedas*, at *Uttarā* 32.102. They appear at the end of the list, their usual placement. *Pañña* 1699 gives the maximum and minimum durations of the three *nokaṣāyavedakarmas* with the male *veda* being the

śaveda) is explained as sexual desire for a woman, and female sexuality (*strīveda*) as sexual desire for a man.³⁶ While the sexuality of third-sex persons (*napuṃsakaveda*) is not defined quite as directly, the character of that sexuality is quite clearly exposed by passages in the canon that view persons of the third sex in the same light as women, that is, as potential dangers to the chastity of monks, as reflected in the many injunctions against associating with them.³⁷ From these passages we may infer that sexual desire for a man forms at least one aspect of third-sex sexuality. In a set of similes descriptive of the relative intensities of the sexualities of the three sexes, that of the third sex is viewed as the most intense of all: a woman's *veda* is compared to a dung fire, a man's to a forest fire, but the third sex's is compared to a burning city.³⁸ Thus third-sex persons are not only sexual persons, but hyperlibidinous ones at that. This belief in their hypersexual nature forms a basis

shortest, and *napuṃsakaveda* the longest. Since the duration of the *karmas* depends on its strength, and the longer the duration the more deleterious it is, the *napuṃsakaveda* is the worst, and *puruṣaveda* the best; see Helmuth von Glasenapp, *The Doctrine of Karman in Jain Philosophy* (Bombay, 1942), p. 23. Those possessing *puruṣaveda* are smallest in number, those who are *napuṃsakaveda* the most numerous; *Viyāha* 6.3.29 in *Vyākhyāprajñāpti Sūtra* (Bombay, 1974–82). Compare also *Pañña* 253. Of the three *vedas*, only the male is considered auspicious; cf. *Tattvārthasūtra* (TS) 8.26. An especially useful translation of the *Tattvārthasūtra*, which is the principal work of Jain dogmatics and one of the few treatises accepted by both Śvetāmbaras and Digambaras, is that by Nathmal Tatia, *That Which Is* (San Francisco, 1994). The *Viyāha* or *Vyākhyāprajñāpti Sūtra* (also known as the *Bhagavati*), a vast work of an encyclopedic character, is available in a partial translation by K. C. Lalwani, *The Bhagavati Sūtra*, 4 vols. (Calcutta, 1973–85).

³⁶ See *Viyāha* 2.5.1. The question under discussion is whether monks who die and become gods enjoy heavenly consorts or create them out of themselves, and thus experience two sexualities (*veda*), female and male, at one and the same time. The correct view presented is that it is not the case that they experience two sexualities, for a soul experiences only one sexuality at any one time, either female or male. When the female sexuality has arisen he does not experience male sexuality and vice versa (“itthiveyassa udayaṇaṃ no puriśavedaṃ veei”). When the female sexuality is aroused a woman desires a male (“itthī itthiveeṇaṃ udiṇṇeṇaṃ purisaṃ patthei”) and when the male sexuality is aroused a man desires a woman. It is a dogma of the Jains that there are no gods who belong to the third sex.

³⁷ For example, mendicants are warned that one of the dangers of drunkenness is seduction by a woman or a *kliba*, see *Ācā*, p. 220. Places for sleep or rest frequented by women and *pandakas* are to be avoided; see *Ācā*, p. 285: “no niggaṃthe itthipasaṃdāgasamsat-tāim sayāṇāsaṇāim sevittae siyā”; also *Thā* 663; *Sama* 9 (see n. 9); *Uttarā* 512. Moreover, monks were even warned of the possibility of rape by *napuṃsakas*; see *Ogha* 217–24; also Shantaram Bhalchandra Deo, *Jaina Monastic Jurisprudence* (Poona, 1960), p. 13.

³⁸ On the similes: for the Śvetāmbaras, *Jivā* 2.74 has a cooking fire (*phumphuaggi*) for the female libido (however, the commentator Malayagiri points out that *phumphu* is a regional term for *kārīsa*, or dung), at 2.98 a forest fire (*ḍavaggi*) for the male, and at 2.140 the conflagration of a great city (*mahānagaradāha*) for the *napuṃsaka*; in the autocom-

for the conception of the third sex as bisexual in orientation (see below, pp. 371–74).

In general, the canon presents persons of the third sex as feminized males, in that they were effeminate and transvestite; that their sexuality should be thought of as identical to that of women is, therefore, not surprising. However, the character of third-sex sexuality as drawn from the canonical literature is not as uncomplicated as it might appear. In the injunction against a mendicant's accepting alms from a *napuṃsaka* it is pointed out that by regularly doing so both the monk and his donor may become emotionally perturbed (*kṣobhaṇa*), that is, sexually aroused, culminating in sexual relations between them. As a consequence people would have doubts about the purity of Jain mendicants and come to believe that they were "just like vile *napuṃsakas*."³⁹ That a *napuṃsaka* would desire to have sexual relations with a man is consonant with what was understood of his sexuality, but what of the desire of an apparently normal man to have sexual relations with one of the third sex?⁴⁰ Is the monk relating to the *napuṃsaka* as a *napuṃsaka* or as a woman,⁴¹ and is saying that the monk is "like a *napuṃsaka*" equivalent to saying he is one? If not, then in what way does he resemble one? If he is one, then there is the problem of how he became a monk in the first place, because such persons designated as *paṇḍaka* or *klība* were explicitly denied ordination.⁴²

It is questions like these that must have stimulated a reconsideration of ideas about the third sex and its sexuality, and the very nature of sexuality itself. Such a rethinking is exhibited in the late Śvetāmbara scripture known as the *Bhāgavati*.⁴³ Here we find what is apparently a fourth sex

mentary to TS 8.10, Umāsvāti has straw, wood, and dung fires (*trṇakāṣṭhakariṣāgni*) for the male, female, and *napuṃsaka* libidos, respectively (note the unusual order of the sexes against the customary female, male, *napuṃsaka*); for the Digambaras, Akalaṅka, in his commentary to TS 2.52 has a wood fire (*dāruvahnī*), straw fire (*trṇāgni*), and a heated brick or brick kiln (*iṣṭakāgni*); Vīrasena in his commentary on *Ṣaṭkh* 1.1.101 quotes a verse giving the similes as a dung fire, a straw fire, and a heated brick or brick kiln (*kārisatanīṭṭa-vāgaggi*).

³⁹ *Ogha* 241–44, in Shantaram Bhalchandra Deo, *History of Jaina Monachism* (Poona, 1956), p. 303; also *Pinḍa* 585.

⁴⁰ This possibility was recognized in *Ācā*, p. 22, when a monk is warned against drunkenness because he may lust after a woman or a *klība*.

⁴¹ That this distinction was possible is indicated at *Ācā*, p. 257, which declares that things are to be called according to what they are, as when a monk sees persons he knows that "this is a woman, this is a man, this is a *klība*."

⁴² *Brh Sū* 4.1–2; *Tā* 202.

⁴³ Like most Jain scriptures the *Viyāha* is a mosaic of parts belonging to different periods. It is likely that on logical grounds the sections that we refer to here are among the more recent, perhaps dating from the second to the fourth centuries C.E.

added to the customary triad, that is, the *puruṣanapumsaka* (“male-*napumsaka*”), in a list of persons belonging to the various mendicant orders.⁴⁴ Thus far, *napumsaka* has referred only to the class of feminized males who were identified by their cross dressing, feminine behavior, and sexual object choice. From its literal meaning, *puruṣanapumsaka* would appear to be indicative of a class of *napumsakas* who look, dress, and act like men.⁴⁵ Since such persons would externally be indistinguishable from “normal,” gender-appropriate men, that characteristic which would make them *napumsaka*, that is, sexually ambiguous, can only be their sexuality, that is, their sexual desire for men,⁴⁶ and as they were considered acceptable to be ordained, their ability to “pass” obviously overrode any objection that might be raised on the grounds of their sexuality. It is also noteworthy that along with a relaxation in the rules regarding the ordination of members of the third sex, such persons were also considered capable of attaining extrasensory knowledge,⁴⁷ and in another text from this same period we also encounter the first acknowledgment that third-sex persons were, like the two other sexes, capable of attaining spiritual liberation, (although they do so in smaller numbers than the other two sexes).⁴⁸

However, in addition to these changes in the basic attitude regarding

⁴⁴ *Viyāha* 25.6.11–12. Of the five kinds of monks, the *pulāya* (husk) may be *purisaveyyaya* (having male sexual feelings) or *purisanapumsagaveyyaya* (having male *napumsaka* feelings); the *bausa* (spotted) and *kūsila* (bad) may have the sexual feelings of any of the three sexes, the last being *purisanapumsagaveyyaya*, one having the sexual feelings of a male-*napumsaka*. In his rendering of the passage in question, Deleu ignores the problem posed by the male-*napumsaka*: “P[ulāga] belong to the male or neuter sex, whereas B[ausa] and K[usila] belong to each of the three sexes,” in Jozef Deleu, *Viyāhapannatti* (*Bhagavatī*) (Brugge, 1970), p. 282.

⁴⁵ *Nisī Bhā* 4745; cf. also *Bṛh Tī* 887–88. The same distinction is found at *Kāmasūtra* 2.9.1–6.

⁴⁶ As an interesting parallel see the description of quite masculine sodomites as partakers in “hermaphroditic” sins in Dante, *Purgatorio*, canto 26, cited in Daston and Park (n. 8 above), p. 424.

⁴⁷ *Viyāha* 9.31.23 (2): a person who has attained extrasensory knowledge (*avadhi*) may be of female *veda*, male *veda*, or *purisanapumsagaveda* (but not *napumsagaveda*).

⁴⁸ *Panna* 1.16; the same at *Jivā* 8. This appears to be the only passage in the canonical literature in which *liṅga* can be construed in the sense of sex; in this stereotyped list of fifteen types of persons who attain spiritual emancipation we find *strīliṅga*, *puruṣa-napumsaka-sva-anya-grha*; the last three referring to those who bear the insignia of Jain mendicants, etc., which suggests that *liṅga* with the terms for the three sexes are to be understood as “bearing the external marks of a woman, etc.,” external mark or sign being the original sense of *liṅga*; see Kshitish Chandra Chatterji, *Technical Terms and Technique of Sanskrit Grammar* (Calcutta, 1964), p. 139. In what is perhaps an earlier statement of the same view at *Uttarā* 1501, the words for the three sexes appear without qualification. At *Uttarā* 1503, 108 men, twenty women, and ten *napumsakas* are said to achieve emancipation at the same time; see Chatterji, p. 302.

the capability of third-sex persons to lead and realize the goals of the religious life, the *Bhagavatī* hints at what can only be described as a revolutionary innovation in thinking about the relation between physical, biological sex and sexuality. Of the five kinds of monks (*nirgrantha*), those called *pulāka* ("husks") may have either male sexuality (*puruṣavedaka*) or masculine third-sex sexuality (*puruṣanapumsakavedaka*), but those called *bakuśa* ("spotted") and *kuśīla* ("bad") may have female sexuality (*strīvedaka*), male sexuality, or masculine third-sex sexuality. This raises the question as to how a monk, who is biologically male (or a masculine *napumsaka* under the new dispensation), could be reckoned as having female sexuality. If this is indeed the case and a biological male can be possessed of a sexuality "appropriate" to one of the other sexes, then would it not be equally possible for a person of any of the three biological sexes to be endowed with any of the three sexualities? And if this is so, what does it mean then to be male, or female, or third sex? Later commentarial discussions of homosexuality, bisexuality, sexual object choice, and the meaning of the three sexes provide attempts at solving such conundrums.

Up to this point, the picture that we have presented of the Jain views of sex and sexuality belongs to the period of canon formation that extended from about the fourth century B.C.E. to the fifth century C.E., just prior to the major schism within the community. In the later period, that of the canonical exegetical literature, many of the problems, questions, and implications of the views of that earlier period are explored.

SAME-SEX BEHAVIOR AND THE THIRD SEX

Sexuality, or the desire for sexual intercourse (*maithunābhilāṣa*)⁴⁹ is, as previously noted, of three kinds: female, male, and third sex, and these are distinguished by the sex of the desired object. We have seen that according to the *Bhagavatī* the desire for coitus with a man defined female sexuality, and coitus with a woman male sexuality. While third-sex sexuality went unexamined in any explicit way in the canonical literature, it seems clear that this sexuality was essentially female in nature. One of the striking innovations of the exegetical period was to define third-sex sexuality as being bisexual in orientation, a position that was accepted by both Jain sectarian divisions.⁵⁰

This definition was not, we believe, driven so much by the actual observation of the sexual behavior of third-sex persons but, rather, by theo-

⁴⁹ *Abhidhānarājendra*, s.v. *veda*.

⁵⁰ For the Śvetāmbaras see, e.g., Abhayadeva on *Sama* 156; and for the Digambaras see Virasena on *Ṣaṭkh* 1.1.101.

retical imperatives. One of these is the necessity to account for the hyperlibidinousness of third-sex sexuality (*napuṃsakaveda*) in the aforementioned similes, for example, “like a blazing city.” Bisexuality would have naturally suggested itself as a way of accounting for this hypersexual nature, since attraction to both sexes implies a greater intensity and duration than that of either female or male sexuality alone.⁵¹ There is, in addition, the taxonomic need to fill the slot for a distinct third-sex sexuality.

This bisexual orientation, however, was not conceived of as being due to a *napuṃsakaveda* completely separate and discrete from the *vedas* of men and women but, rather, to the possession of both *vedas*; third-sex persons are considered to be endowed with *both* male and female sexualities. The additive effect of this combination was illustrated through the use of a simile that may have formed a part of the traditional teaching on this subject. In this set of similes the three sexualities are compared to the humors (*doṣa*) of the traditional medical system, and the taste for certain types of foods with which they are associated: the expression of female sexuality in the desire for a man is like bile (*pitta*), which causes a craving for something sweet; male sexuality as expressed in the desire for a woman is compared to phlegm (*śleṣma*), which gives rise to the desire for something sour; while the third sex’s desire for both men and women is like that of bile and phlegm together, which results in a craving for something both sweet and sour, such as curds mixed with sugar and spices.⁵²

The definition of third-sex sexuality as the possession of both male and female sexualities relieved the Jains of the need to solve the riddle as to what the nature of a truly distinct third-sex *veda* might be. It also provided them with a convenient explanation for same-sex sexual activity, which is highly relevant to monastic discipline. One of the three

⁵¹ See, e.g., Devendrasūri, *Catvāraḥ Karmagranthāḥ* (Piṇḍvādā, 1975) p. 44: “Just as a blazing city burns for a great period of time and spreads to a great degree, in the same way, when the third-sex sexuality [*napuṃsakaveda*] comes to fruition there is an intense desire to have sex with women and men which does not disappear for a great period of time, nor is there satiation in sexual relations.” It should be noted that this belief in the intense heat of the third sex’s sexuality was by no means a complimentary one, from the Jain point of view, since they regarded all heat other than that produced by religious austerities (*tapas*) as a defiling factor impeding spiritual growth; see Jaini, *Jaina Path* (n. 12 above), p. 105.

⁵² The earliest appearance of these similes known to us is in Siddhasena’s commentary on *TS* 8.10 (2.142) where they are presented in a somewhat unintelligible form. See Devendrasūri, p. 44. On the humors of Indian medicine and food tastes see A. K. Ramanujan, “Food for Thought: Toward an Anthology of Hindu Food-Images,” in *The Eternal Food: Gastronomic Ideas and Experiences of Hindus and Buddhists*, ed. R. S. Khare (Albany, NY, 1992), esp. p. 229.

grounds on which a monk may be expelled from the community is homosexual behavior,⁵³ which is defined as "a pair of males (*puruṣayuga*) performing sexual intercourse with each other involving the mouth and anus."⁵⁴ This is attributed to the possession of both male and female sexuality,⁵⁵ which is equated with third-sex sexuality. In our survey of the canonical literature we did not encounter any reference to actual bisexual practices of third-sex persons. In contrast, those doxographers who discuss third-sex sexuality universally characterize it as bisexual, and with a single exception ignore the possibility of an exclusive orientation toward males, even though desire for males was the only orientation recognized in canonical works for such persons.⁵⁶

What is of particular interest in the treatment of same-sex sexuality is that its practitioners were not considered to be third-sex persons per se, but rather males endowed with the third-sex sexuality (*napuṃsakaveda*), that is, desire for both males and females. Since *napuṃsakas* are by definition a third sex, they presumably could be considered "homosexual" only if they had sex with another *napuṃsaka*, which is a possibility not entertained in the literature. This prompts the question as to whether the Jains were able to draw a meaningful distinction between *napuṃsakas* who possessed third-sex sexuality and males, that is, non-*napuṃsakas*, who possessed third-sex sexuality by virtue of their participation in same-sex sexual behavior. We have already seen that in the late canonical period a distinction had been made between the masculine *napuṃsaka* (*purusanapuṃsaka*) and the effeminate *napuṃsaka* (*paṇḍaga* or *klība*), which allowed for the former's ordination. This distinction was more clearly drawn in the exegetical literature.

The masculine *napuṃsaka* differs from his effeminate counterpart in more than mere appearance and behavior, but in sexual practice as well. We think it accords with the evidence to infer that the sexual role of the effeminate *napuṃsaka* as portrayed in the canonical literature was as the receptor in acts of oral or anal intercourse. On the other hand, the masculine *napuṃsaka* is both active and passive (*paḍisevati paḍisevāveti*),⁵⁷

⁵³ *Annāmannam Karamāṇe*. This is the traditional interpretation of *Brh Sū* 4.2, although a sexual infraction may not have been originally meant; see Walther Schubring, *Das Kalpa-Sūtra* (Leipzig, 1905), p. 43.

⁵⁴ Abhayadeva on *Thā* 201.

⁵⁵ See *Brh Bhā* 5026: "āsaga-posagasevī, keī purisā duveyagā hoṃti."

⁵⁶ In his commentary on *TS* 8.10 Siddhasena remarks that the *napuṃsakaveda* takes many forms; "for one person, there is the desire which has both men and women for its object . . . while for another there is the desire for men only (*puruṣeṣvevābhilāṣaḥ*)."

⁵⁷ *Nisī Cū* 3507. *Paḍisevāveti*; i.e., he causes someone else to commit an offense upon him; cf. the Buddhist *Mahāvagga* 1.59.15–17 (Nava Nalanda edition) where a hermaphrodite is denied ordination because "he commits [*karoti*] and causes [others] to commit [*kā-āpeti*]." As explained by Buddhaghosa in *Samanta* 3.1078 (Nava Nalanda edition),

and it is his active behavior, we believe, which makes him male. In this case the explanation of third-sex sexuality as a combination of both male and female sexualities makes sense; the passive employment of the mouth and anus is analogous to the use of a woman's *yoni* in the expression of female sexuality, while acting as the penetrator is the expression of male sexuality. It is for this reason, we believe, that when homosexual acts are reciprocal the participants are considered males, while purely receptive behavior is characteristic of the effeminate *napumsaka*. Since the exegetical literature explicitly ascribes the commission of homosexual acts to the possession of third-sex sexuality, we can only conclude that the third sex was tacitly admitted by the Jains to be the homosexual sex. In this view then, sexual behavior becomes the defining characteristic of membership in the class of third-sex persons.⁵⁸

DISENTANGLING SEX, SEXUALITY, AND GENDER

Although we have found that bisexuality, as the defining characteristic of third-sex sexuality, conceals an essentially homosexual core, Jain scholastics were also led by the exigencies of their system to posit a universal potential for a bisexual orientation. In this view persons are not endowed at birth with a fixed and unchanging sexual orientation toward either males or females but are capable of responding sexually to persons of either sex. This position was reinforced by the crucial distinction that Jain authors made between biological sex and psychological gender.

By the fifth century C.E. the Jains had distinguished between biological sex (*dravyalinga*), marked by the primary and secondary sexual characteristics, and psychological gender (*bhāvalinga*),⁵⁹ which was held to be the characteristic psychic makeup of a particular sex, including its sex-

"Commits": With the male sexual organ he commits a sexual transgression with women; 'Causes to commit': Having incited another, he causes [another] to commit [a sexual transgression] in his own female sexual organ."

⁵⁸The only reference to bisexuality that we have encountered is at *Nisī Bhā* 3604 (= *Brh Bhā* 5171) where the unmale's bisexuality is an argument against ordination since it makes it impossible for him to dwell as a monk among men, or a nun among women.

⁵⁹See Jaini, *Gender* (n. 23 above), pp. 11 ff. On the terms *dravya* and *bhāva* as analytical categories referring to the material and the mental aspects of what is being analyzed, see Ludwig Alsdorf, "Nikṣepa—a Jaina Contribution to Scholastic Methodology," in his *Kleine Schriften*, ed. Albrecht Wezler (Wiesbaden, 1974), pp. 257–65. The consideration of the soul from the point of view of sexual feelings or sexuality is fundamental to the Jain canonical literature of both schools; cf. the Śvetāmbara *Panna* 8.6, and the Digambara *Ṣaṭkh* 1.1.101 ff. Although *dravya* and *bhāva* as analytical categories are common to both Śvetāmbaras and Digambaras, the characterization of the primary and secondary sexual characteristics as *dravyalinga* ("material [sexual] mark") and sexuality as *bhāvalinga* ("psychological [sexual] mark") belongs to the Digambara. For what is probably their earliest appearance see Pūjyapāda (sixth century C.E.) on *TS* 2.52. The Śvetāmbaras refer to the

uality. Thus, for example, the gender-typical female psyche (*strībhāva*) includes tenderness, timidity, passion, pride, and inconstancy, as well as the sexual desire for men (*pumskāmana*).⁶⁰ No other Indian system of thought separated these two aspects of sex and gender. As a consequence sex assignment as a matter of categorization on the basis of primary and secondary sexual characteristics was deemed inadequate, because it fails to include such psychological characteristics.⁶¹ Once biological sex and psychological gender were distinguished it was natural, given the general tendency of the Jain system, to assume that they were occasioned by different kinds of causes.⁶² There is then no logical necessity for agreement between the two, a supposition that is confirmed in the words of one text, appealing to experience: "While biology and psychology are congruent in a majority of cases, they are not always so."⁶³ Thus, a biological male (*dravyapuruṣa*) need not necessarily be a male psychologically (*bhāvapuruṣa*), that is, endowed with male sexuality, but he may in fact experience female or third-sex sexuality, and the same will be true, *mutatis mutandis*, for the two other sexes as well.⁶⁴ This view, with a single, notable exception, is, as we shall see, maintained by both Jain sectarian divisions. In addition, the inadequacy of making a sex assignment based on primary and secondary sexual characteristics also extends to gender role markers as well, such as gender-typical clothing, behavior, language, and interests.⁶⁵

material and psychological sexual marks as external (*bāhya*) and internal (*ābhyantara*); see *Nisī Cū* 3570 and *BrhTi* 5147. For Pūjyapāda's commentary on the *TS* we have consulted the translation of S. A. Jain, *Reality* (Calcutta, 1960).

⁶⁰ See Akalaṅka on *TS* 8.9. Similar qualities were considered to be part of the male or female "nature" by seventeenth-century European medical experts; see Daston and Park (n. 8 above), p. 428.

⁶¹ See n. 60 above. *Viśeṣāvaśyakabhāṣya* (*Vi Āva Bhā*) 2564 points out that members of the third sex have such masculine characteristics as a beard, and that male dress, e.g., may be worn by women, so that gender assignment cannot be made on the basis of such external criteria. As for the other possible criteria that we looked at before, e.g., the possession of conceptive capacity as the essential marker of femaleness, this too is rejected on the grounds that prepubescent girls or postmenopausal women could not then be regarded as female; see Pūjyapāda on *TS* 2.52.

⁶² Biological sex (*dravyalinga*) is brought about by *nāmakarma*, whereas psychological sexuality (*bhāvalinga*) results from the *nokaṣāyakarma*; see esp. Akalaṅka on *TS* 2.50–51.

⁶³ *Gommatasāra* (Jivakāṇḍa) 271.

⁶⁴ *Nisī Bhā* 3571 (= *Brh Bhā* 5148): "The special characteristic is that each of the sexualities [*vedas*] can be independent of its proper locus and be present in the other two loci." For example, a woman can equally have a female sexuality, male sexuality, or third-sex sexuality, and the same is true for men and third-sex persons. For the Śvetāmbara view of this issue see *Vi Āva Bhā* 2565 (cited by Abhayadeva on *Thā* 128), where male sexuality is the example, and *Nisī Bhā* 3570 (= *Brh Bhā* 5147) where third-sex sexuality is the example.

⁶⁵ Although the *Vi Āva Bhā* 2564 mentions only male dress (*puruṣaveṣa*) that can be worn, e.g., by women, the intention is clear. For a description of the stereotypically feminine gender characteristics, see *Nisī Bhā* 3569–70 (= *Brh Bhā* 5146–5147).

Such a separation of sexuality from physiology, and of both from the gender-role signs believed to accompany each of the sexes, marks the mature phase of the Jain creation of sexuality and is maintained by both Śvetāmbaras and Digambaras. This viewpoint came to play a role of great importance in the selection of candidates for ordination and in the debates between the Śvetāmbaras and the Digambaras over the ordination of woman and their capacity to attain spiritual liberation (below, pp. 379–81).

SEXUALITY AND MONASTIC ORDINATION

During the formative centuries of the Jain religion the rules concerning the admissibility of persons to the order were fairly simple; all males were considered worthy of ordination with three exceptions: the effeminate (*paṇḍaka*), the sexually defective (*klība*), and the ill (*vyādhita*; see above). One of the hallmarks of the developed Śvetāmbara exegetical literature is a complex schema of those who are and are not fit to be ordained: among males, eighteen types are denied ordination, among women, twenty, and among the third sex, ten.⁶⁶ These three lists are basically two: that of the eighteen males, to which two further restrictions pertaining only to woman are added, yielding the twenty types of unordainable women, and that of the third sex. Common to both lists are the original three nonordainable categories.⁶⁷ That the three are found included in the list of nonordainable males is indicative of the original view, which saw them essentially as defective males, that is, “unmales.”

So far as the list of *napuṃsakas* is concerned, the ten nonordainables are part of a larger list of sixteen, the members of which do not differ greatly from types recognized by Buddhist and Brahmanical scholars.⁶⁸ For the Jains as well, the third sex has come to comprise a rather

⁶⁶ *Nisī Bhā* 3506–8, 3561–62 ff. On the persons not qualified to be ordained, see Deo, *History* (n. 39 above), p. 140. The Digambara view of eligibility appears to be quite straightforward; if a man is without genital defects and virile he is ordainable, but not if he is overly libidinous; essentially, a man may be considered unfit if for any reason his ordination would bring the community into disrepute. *Napuṃsakas*, i.e., those who are physically third sex (*dravyanapuṃsaka*), are denied ordination because, like women, they cannot give up the wearing of clothes; see *Jainendrasiddhāntakośa*, s.v. *pravrajyā*, *veda*.

⁶⁷ With *napuṃsaka* instead of *paṇḍaka* as in *Brh Sū* 4.4 and *Thā* 202; see Abhayadeva on *Thā* 202. Included among both unordainable men and women is the *napuṃsaka*. By the former a *napuṃsaka* in the guise of a male is meant as opposed to a *napuṃsaka* in the guise of a *napuṃsaka*, i.e., effeminate and/or transvestite; *Nisī Cū* 3736; also the commentary on *Pravacanasāroddhāra* 791. The female *napuṃsaka* essentially just fills a slot and nothing more is heard of her; according to *Nisī Cū* 3508 the female *napuṃsaka* experiences the *napuṃsakaveda* as well as the *strīveda*.

⁶⁸ The sixteen types of *napuṃsakas*, according to the *Brh Tī* 5166–67, are (1) *paṇḍaka*, (2) *vātika*, (3) *klība*, (4) *kumbhin*, (5) *īrya*, (6) *śakuni*, (7) *tatkarmasevi*, (8) *pāksikāpāk-*

heterogenous class of individuals, all of whom are anomalous in some aspect of their sexual anatomy, physiology, or behavior. What is of interest is that for the most part these are males who are "blocked" in the exercise of their sexuality (*niruddhaveda*) in one way or another owing to their performance of unvirtuous actions in the past and are thus "transformed" into members of the third sex.⁶⁹

The separation of sexuality from morphological sex and gender role had implications for the organization of the mendicant community as well. Since appearance was no longer an infallible guide in deducing a person's sexuality, we find that in the Śvetāmbara rite of ordination for monks, the sexuality of the prospective candidate is to be ascertained first, by questioning the candidate himself, and then, if there remains some doubt, by interrogating his friends. The candidate would be asked what was it with which he was disgusted (*nirveda*) that led him to seek renunciation; this might result in the admission that it was his third-sex sexuality that motivated his desire for renunciation. Again, his friends might be asked why such a strong, healthy young man would seek renunciation, to which the answer might be that his sexuality was the cause. The fact that third-sex sexuality was seen as a motivating factor for a person to renounce the pleasures and ties of ordinary society is revelatory of an awareness of the internalized disapproval and social stigma that attached to such sexuality. The candidate might also be told at the outset of the interview that third-sex persons are unfit for ordination, so that if he was one he would withdraw, believing himself to have been somehow discovered. He would also, of course, be examined for marks of effeminacy in speech, deportment, and interests.⁷⁰

One of the grounds on which third-sex persons may be denied ordination is that of their excessive libidinousness, which is believed to render them incapable of maintaining their vows.⁷¹ This hyperlibidinousness, which as we have seen was ascribed to the bisexual character

śika, (9) *saugandhika*, (10) [*āsakta*], (11) *varddhita*, (12) *cippita*, (13) *mantreṇopahata*, (14) *auśadhyā upahata*, (15) *ṛṣiṇā śapta*, (16) *devena śapta*; cf. Zwilling (n. 29 above), p. 204; Sweet and Zwilling (n. 9 above), p. 593. Another, shorter list of fourteen *napuṃsakas*, with a few types not found in the longer list, is to be found in the *Āṅgavijjā* 9.3.400–404; see *Āṅgavijjā* (Banaras, 1957), p. 73.

⁶⁹ Compare *Nisī Cū* 3577 and esp. *Brh Tī* 5167: "*ete sarve 'pi niruddhavastāyaḥ*" (!!; read *niruddhavedāḥ* following *Tī* on 5166) "*kālāntareṇa napuṃsakatayā pariṇamanti*."

⁷⁰ *Nisī Bhā* 3564–70b (= *Brh Bhā* 5141–47b). In contemporary Thai Buddhism, candidates for monkhood are routinely questioned about their sexuality in order to screen out third-sex persons; see Peter A. Jackson, "From *Kamma* to Unnatural Vice: Thai Buddhist Accounts of Homosexuality and AIDS" (paper presented at the International Thai Studies Conference, London, July 1993).

⁷¹ See, e.g., Abhayadeva on *Thā* 202.

of third-sex sexuality, provided the rationale for the exclusion of third-sex persons from living in a same-sex community, inasmuch as normative males and females were assumed to be safe from sexual temptation in gender-segregated communities, but the bisexual third-sex person would be at risk himself, and a source of danger to others, among either males or females.⁷² However, it must be said that the prime concern here, as in the many rules regulating contacts between monks and *napumsakas*, was the fear that the stigma of the third-sex person's socially transgressive behavior might be extended to the mendicant order as a whole. There is, for example, an anecdote about rowdy young people taunting Jain mendicants as ostensibly being *napumsakas*, which results in a brawl; such violent conduct is, of course, totally abhorrent to Jain ethics and decorum.⁷³ There is evidence that monks and mendicants were, in fact, associated in the popular mind with "third-sex" sexual practices.⁷⁴

Sexuality also figured in determining the worthiness of third-sex persons to serve either as lay disciples or as donors from whom a monk may accept food, clothes, or lodging. It was first necessary to distinguish those who dress as men from those who dress as women, and those who are fornicators (*pratisevina*) from those who are not (*apratisevina*). While conventionally masculine *napumsakas* may be either fornicators or not, transvestites are most definitely (*niyamāt*) considered to be fornicators. Masculine *napumsakas* may be acceptable as lay disciples (*samj-ñin*);⁷⁵ presumably this applies only to the chaste among them, since it is only from a chaste male *napumsaka*, for instance, that a monk may accept clothes.⁷⁶ However, in the rules concerning lodging, male *napumsakas* are regarded as males, and the transvestites as women.⁷⁷

In the course of time the ban against the ordination of all third-sex persons was ameliorated to a very large extent. First, exceptions were made on purely practical grounds, such as when the candidate was known to be especially well connected, for example, to the local ruler, or had special expertise in an area such as medicine or administration, or was politically astute and could protect the community during times of royal disfavor.⁷⁸ Second, a relaxation of the ban was based on a distinc-

⁷²This discussion is found in *Nisī Cū* 3602–4; *Brh Tī* 5169–71.

⁷³See *Nisī Cū* 3587; *Brh Tī* 5163. Scenes of taunting of third-sex persons by children and adolescents are common in India today; see Nanda (n. 20 above), pp. 9, 50, 100.

⁷⁴For example, see sculptural representations of mendicants who are sexually aroused by laymen in Alain Danielou, *La Sculpture Érotique Hindoue* (Paris, 1973), pp. 202–5; and the story about the third-sex monk who aroused social disapproval in Zwilling, pp. 207–8.

⁷⁵*Brh Tī* 2570. Compare *Nisī Cū* 5214.

⁷⁶*Brh Tī* 639.

⁷⁷*Nisī Bhā* 5217–24 (= *Brh Bhā* 2572–79).

⁷⁸*Brh Bhā* 5173–74, quoted in Deo, *Jaina Monastic Jurisprudence* (n. 37 above), p. 14.

tion having been drawn between those third-sex persons who were capable of controlling their sexuality and those who were not, which was the same distinction that was made in the case of suitable donors to monks. Among the sixteen subtypes of third-sex persons referred to earlier, ten were regarded as uncontrollable in their passions and hence unsuitable for ordination, while the remaining six were considered fit.⁷⁹ By the seventeenth century this distinction was explicitly linked to congenital or noncongenital status, with the latter permitted ordination because "for the most part they experience male sexuality alone." In fact, by this time the rigid strictures against the association of third-sex persons with monks, which we found in the earliest texts, had now gone by the boards even in the case of the congenital third-sex types, who were now permitted to assume the vows of a layman.⁸⁰ We can see the radical change of attitudes in Jain texts over time, from that of total nonacceptance to a nearly total acceptance of third-sex persons as participants in the Jain community.

SEXUALITY AND THE DEBATE OVER WOMEN⁸¹

Of the two traditions, the Śvetāmbaras may be reckoned as the more liberal regarding the position of women, given their acceptance of women as worthy of full ordination and capable of attaining liberation in the female body.⁸² The opposite position was taken by the Digambaras, for whom biological male sex is indispensable for both full ordination and liberation. Despite the fact that women's incapacity for liberation is a central tenet of the Digambaras, their principal scripture,

⁷⁹ *Nisī Bhā* 3561–62, and *Abhidhānaraajendra*, s.v. *napuṃsaka*.

⁸⁰ See *Yuktiṭīrabodha*, translated in Jaini, *Gender* (n. 23 above), pp. 177–78.

⁸¹ This debate has been explicated and very fully exposed through translations of extracts from the principal commentaries in Jaini, *Gender*.

⁸² Of course, Western political dichotomies such as liberalism-conservatism have at best heuristic value in this context. Despite their theoretical spiritual equality, Jain female mendicants are formally absolutely subject to the control of male mendicants among both sects (Dundas [n. 12 above], p. 52) and the modern Śvetāmbara mendicants are much more socially conservative (i.e., hierarchical, tradition-bound) than the more individualistic Digambaras—see John E. Cort, "The Śvetāmbar Mūrtipūjak Jain Mendicant," *Man* 26 (1991): 651–71. Although female mendicants are much more numerous and appear to have more social influence among the Śvetambaras (see Jaini, *Gender*, p. 26), it is a curious fact that the most prominent woman leader of a Jain sect, Campabāhen Mataji, was a neo-Digāmbara (Dundas, p. 231). Recent developments include a nun who is head of a Śvetāmbara Sthānakavasi subsect, and a nun appointed, for the first time, to the rank of *ācārya* (Paul Dundas, letter to Leonard Zwilling and Michael J. Sweet, July 17, 1995). Furthermore, the Jains as a whole accord higher social and legal status to women than do Hindus (Dundas, p. 5).

the *Śaṭkhaṇḍāgama*, contains a passage suggesting the opposite.⁸³ In attempting to explain this away the Digambaras based their stand on the separability of biological and psychological sex, arguing that the word *maṇuṣyīṇi* in the offending passage meant not “woman,” as it ordinarily does, but “a man with a woman’s sexuality (*stribhāva*).”⁸⁴

The Digambaras also used the same argument to deny the literal sense of those passages in the texts of their adversaries, which spoke of the liberation of third-sex persons,⁸⁵ again claiming that what was meant was actually a biological male with the sexuality of a woman or a *napuṃsaka*.⁸⁶ This view was attacked by Śākaṭyāna, of the independent Yāpanīya sect, one of the key figures in the female liberation debate, who argued that there is a correspondence between sexuality and physical gender such that female sexuality, for example, can only arise in a biological female.⁸⁷ However, he presciently observed that persons are, at various times, capable of being sexually aroused by the opposite sex, the same sex, or even by animals. The reason for this is not the momentary acquisition of some other sexuality—since one who in the absence of a human partner has sex with an animal cannot be said to have suddenly acquired an animal sexuality—but rather the polymorphous nature of that person’s sexuality itself (*svakaveda*).⁸⁸ In what appears to be a rejection of the very notion of three individual sexualities, he claims that sexuality can no more be distinguished along gender lines than can other emotional states like anger or pride.⁸⁹

Śākaṭyāna’s conception of sexuality is that it is fluid and innately un-

⁸³See *Śaṭkh* 1.1.92–93; text and translation in Jaini, *Gender*, pp. 110–11. Despite their rejection of the possibility of *mokṣa* for women, the worship of female deities is widespread among the Digambaras, as it is among the Svetāmbaras (Dundas, pp. 182–83).

⁸⁴In Śākaṭyāna’s *Strinirvāṇaprakaraṇa* (SNP) in *Strinirvāṇa-Kevalibhuktīprakaraṇa* (Bhavnagar, 1974), p. 30; the cited scripture has not been identified. For translation see Jaini, *Gender*, p. 76. As a representation of this debate, one may note the figure of Malli[nātha], whom the Śvetāmbaras claim as the sole female among the twenty-four Jinas of our age, but whom the Digambaras insist is male (Jaini, *Gender*, pp. 14–15). Nevertheless, even the Śvetāmbara representations of this figure (with one exception) are male, or at least without any distinguishing female characteristics, perhaps to accord with the doctrine of the genderlessness of the *jīva* (soul) after final liberation (see Marcus Banks, “Representing the Bodies of the Jains,” in *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*, ed. Marcus Banks and Howard Murphy [New Haven, CT, in press]).

⁸⁵In his comment on *Paṇṇa* 1.16 (on which see n. 48 above), Malayagiri explains that the three sexes are here so called on the basis of their bodily development, rather than on psychological sexuality (*veda*) or dress (*nepathya*), i.e., gender role. He contrasts this with the Digāmbara view that liberation can be attained only by those with a male body.

⁸⁶SNP, p. 30. Translation in Jaini, *Gender*, p. 76, and also pp. 163–65.

⁸⁷SNP, p. 36. Translation in Jaini, *Gender*, p. 86.

⁸⁸SNP, pp. 37–38. Translation in Jaini, *Gender*, pp. 89–90.

⁸⁹SNP, p. 35. Translation in Jaini, *Gender*, p. 84.

differentiated; however, this was not the belief that prevailed. The Śvetāmbaras, in accepting the notion of three distinct sexualities, argue that if a man with female sexuality can attain liberation, then there can be no grounds for denying the same possibility to a woman with the female sexuality natural to her, or even to a woman with male sexuality.⁹⁰ Thus, the Śvetāmbaras accept that all people have the potential for liberation, including women and those who would now be labeled as lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. Same-sex desire and behavior was, as we have seen, ascribed to a person having the sexuality of the other sex, or having two sexualities.⁹¹

JAIN AND MODERN SEXUALITIES

It remains for us to survey briefly the implications of these Jain ideas and attitudes for gender studies and the history of sexuality in general. Taken as a whole, they compel a revision of the oft-repeated assertion that a systematized and socially mobilized discourse on gender and sexuality was first created by modern Europeans.⁹² A recent version of this argument refers to the pre-British colonial period: "Prior to that time there was sex, passion, and sensuality, to be sure, and there was an elaborate discourse on the art of sex—replete with categories and modes of classification . . . but there was no sense in which an apparatus of sexuality provided a definitive moral yardstick against which to measure the appropriateness of various acts or the status of actors."⁹³ To take this stance, which synecdochically identifies the whole of Indian civilization with the worldview of the treatises on erotics, is to fall into an Orientalist fantasy of viewing non-Western cultures as the sensual Other in which, as Foucault imagines, "pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and the forbidden, nor by reference to a criterion of utility."⁹⁴ This fantasy can only be sustained as long as one ignores the elaborate sociocultural mechanism for the control of sexual-

⁹⁰ *Yuktiṭṭrabodha*, translated in Jaini, *Gender*, p. 164.

⁹¹ *Brh Bhā* 5026 (see n. 55 above) cited by Abhayadeva on *Thā* 201. Homosexual activity (*annamannaṃ karemaṇe*) between monks is one of only three offenses punishable by expulsion from the order (*pārañciya*), the other two being criminality (*duṭṭha*), i.e., committing a deadly offense against one's superior, or rape, and neglect (*pammatta*) of the rules regarding food and sleep. Even pious laypeople are supposed to restrict themselves to conventional heterosexual intercourse with their wives; see Jaini, *Jaina Path* (n. 12 above), p. 176.

⁹² Among the many articulate proponents of this proposition are Jeffrey Weeks, *Against Nature* (London, 1991), esp. pp. 10–45, 68–85. See also the works cited in n. 1 above.

⁹³ Joseph S. Alter, "Celibacy, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Gender into Nationalism in North India," *Journal of Asian Studies* 53 (1994): 45–66.

⁹⁴ Foucault (n. 1 above), p. 57.

ity that is evidenced by Indian texts, as well as by historical and anthropological data. Not only was “elaborate discourse” about sexuality conducted by the Jains, as well as by Buddhist and Brahmanical authors, but this discourse was mobilized by Brahmanical law as well as by Buddhist and Jain monastic jurisprudence, all of which had clear social and religious interests in the definition and control of sexuality.⁹⁵ In the Jain case, control was enforced by the examination of signs of nonnormative sexuality and gender as a requirement for ordination, as discussed above, and also through both formal rules for proper lay and mendicant sexual and gender-role behavior and powerful, informal social rewards and sanctions.⁹⁶

In support of the social constructionist viewpoint, however, the Jain material provides additional evidence for the culturally determined and variable nature of sexual/gender identities and categories. Characteristics such as cross-dressing, impotence, physiological sexual anomalies, and same-sex orientation, which in the West are generally signifiers of a perverse or pathological masculinity or femininity, indicate membership in a discrete third-sex category in Indian culture as a whole, and among the Jains in particular. Nor is the Jain assignment of “genuine” masculinity or femininity on the basis of sexual object choice isomorphic with contemporary sexological theory.

In attempting to make sense of the differences in biological sex, gender role, sexual behavior, and orientation that they observed in their environment, and stimulated as well by internal contradictions and questions in the sexological theories that they inherited, some Jain scholars came to conclusions at variance with the received ideas of their time. The most significant of their innovative ideas were that sexuality and sexual object choice were separate from biological sex and gender role, and that bisexuality as well as homosexuality and heterosexuality were a possibility for both males and females, with bisexuality normatively characterizing the highly libidinous third sex. This viewpoint makes up the uniquely

⁹⁵On religio-legal sanctions against homosexual conduct in *dharmaśāstra*, including loss of cast and inheritance rights, see Wendy Doniger and Brian Smith trans., *The Laws of Manu* (New York, 1991), pp. 58–59, 68, 92–93, 177, 220, 267–68. On penalties in Buddhism, see Zwillig (n. 29 above), p. 207.

⁹⁶While the Buddhist monastic communal confession of sins, including sexual misdeeds that may result in expulsion from the order, takes place once a fortnight, on full and new moon days (*poṣadha*), the comparable Jain observance (*paḍīkakamaṇa*) is performed twice each day; Tatia, *Aspects of Jain Monasticism* (n. 32 above), pp. 331–33. On lay codes of conduct, see Dundas (n. 12 above), pp. 161–65; on informal social control, see Josephine Reynell, “Women and Reproduction of the Jain Community,” in *The Assembly of Listeners: Jains in Society*, ed. Michael Carrithers and Caroline Humphries (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 62–65.

Jain contribution to Indian sexology. It is an interesting parallel development that the same combination of libidinousness and bisexuality was also used to describe the anomalous sexual category of the *mollis* in the Greco-Roman medical literature.⁹⁷

The acknowledgment of multiple possibilities for sexuality regardless of biological sex or gender is in accord with (although not necessarily related to) the Jain philosophical tenet of "non-onesidedness" (*anekāntavāda*), which upholds a multifaceted and situationally determined view of reality.⁹⁸ The Jain explanation of same-sex orientation as "female sexuality" in a biological male, or male sexuality in a biological female, is quite analogous to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sexologists' understanding of "the homosexual" as "a female soul in a male body," or vice versa.⁹⁹ The Jains' ability to differentiate between a psychological sexuality or sexual orientation and biological sex foreshadows the complex typologies of modern sexological theory, with the proliferation of categories such as gender role, sexual identity, sexual orientation, and genetic and morphologic sex, which may or may not be mutually commensurate.¹⁰⁰ Their attribution of distinct biological and "genetic" (i.e., karmic) causes for the three types of sexuality implies that there is a unified entity that is the source of sexual expression, a hallmark of sexuality in its modern sense.

Although the literature surveyed here was all written by male renunciants, it may offer at least a glimpse of social reality as they observed it. Descriptions of organizational expedience in accepting sexually non-normative individuals into the order if they were not too effeminate, followed the rules, and/or had some valued skill,¹⁰¹ or vignettes of a third-sex mendicant carrying on bitchily and seductively, have too many

⁹⁷ Caelius Aurelianus (n. 5 above), p. 901. On this interpretation see Halperin, *One Hundred Years* (n. 1 above), p. 23.

⁹⁸ See Jaini, *Jaina Path*, pp. 93–94; and Dundas, pp. 197–200.

⁹⁹ See Magnus Hirschfeld, *Geschlechtskunde: Auf Grund dreißigjähriger Forschung und Erfahrung bearbeitet*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1930), 1:543–601; and Harry Oosterhuis, "Homosexual Emancipation in Germany before 1933," in *Homosexuality and Male Bonding in Pre-Nazi Germany*, ed. Harry Oosterhuis and trans. Hubert Kennedy (New York, 1991), pp. 1–2, 12–15.

¹⁰⁰ As a representative example, see Holly Devor, "Sexual Orientation Identities, Attractions, and Practices of Female-to-Male Transsexuals," *Journal of Sex Research* 30 (1993): 303–15.

¹⁰¹ *Nisī Bhā* 3604–7 (= *Brh Bhā* 5171–74); and Dco, *Jaina Monastic Jurisprudence* (n. 37 above), p. 14. The principal of social expedience was widely used in Jain judgments on ordination, as in passages cited in Collette Caillat, *Atonements in the Ancient Rituals of the Jaina Monks* (Ahmedabad, 1975), p. 58, which praise the admission of physically attractive, socially powerful, or technically skillful male postulants to the order.

analogues in numerous contemporary cultures to be mere scholastic speculations.¹⁰² Then too, it seems intuitively apparent that the Jains' liberation of sexuality from a necessary bond with biology, breaking through many centuries of cultural presupposition, must have sprung at least in part from observations of real people, whose sexual behaviors were not commensurate with their physical or gender-role characteristics and thus did not fit the old paradigm. To what degree these texts mirrored the life of their times remains to be determined by further cross-disciplinary investigations.¹⁰³ What is incontrovertible is that the writers of these texts, using the raw materials supplied by Indian culture as well as by their experience, constructed elaborate discourses on the nature of sexuality, sex, and gender that offered novel ways of thinking about these crucial and enigmatic facets of human experience.

¹⁰² There is some corroboratory evidence in related areas; e.g., the fact that among the Śvetāmbaras female mendicants greatly outnumber males and exert strong influence on the laity; see Jaini, *Jaina Path* (n. 12 above), p. 246; Reynell, pp. 60–61; and N. Shanta, *La Voie Jaina* (Paris, 1985), pp. 443–44. On the other hand, the Digambaras have few female ascetics, of limited social authority (Dundas, p. 52; Jaini, *Gender* [n. 23 above], p. 26). This lends credence to the hypothesis that there is some connection between the great textual tradition and social realities.

¹⁰³ Additional anthropological, literary, and artistic data will be extremely helpful in fleshing out the social history of the third sex among the Jains. Areas for investigation include the enormous corpus of Jain popular literature, consisting of religious legends and traditional tales, which may throw significant light on questions of gender and sexuality. Further study of Jain art (see Banks [n. 84 above]) is likely to yield important findings, as would psychological and sociological research on sex and gender roles, perceptions, and attitudes among Jain laity and mendicants. There appears to be no existing ethnographic research about third-sex persons among the Jains (Serena Nanda, letter to Leonard Zwillling and Michael J. Sweet, March 1994).



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Viṣṇu's Mohinī Incarnation

An Iconographical and Sexological Study

by RAJU KALIDOS

Avatāra is a descent or down-coming of God ⁽¹⁾ as a human being or animal with a view to protect the world from demons and evil-mongers ⁽²⁾. Viṣṇu, the Hindu God of Protection, is said to have descended to the earth through his major *avatāras* ⁽³⁾, which are ten in number ⁽⁴⁾. There are also partial incarnations of Viṣṇu, known as *aṁśāvatāra* ⁽⁵⁾. The medieval Tamil lexicon, *Piṅgalam*, describes Mohinī as one among the *mūvaintavatāram* 'fifteen incarnations' of Viṣṇu ⁽⁶⁾. This indicates that, apart from the ten major ones there are a number of minor *avatāras* connected with Viṣṇu. Mohinī is one among the minor *avatāras*. Viṣṇu is said to have taken the form of Mohinī on three important occasion: (1) to distribute the *amṛta* 'ambrosia' among the demons and gods when the Ocean of Milk was churned, (2) the visit to the Dārūka forest along with Bhikṣātana as the latter's spouse and (3) the destruction of Bhaṣmāsura.

⁽¹⁾ According to J. Gonda the *avatāra* is only an appearance (*Erscheinung*). Ebegg calls it an embodiment (*Verkörperung*) (Parrinder 1970: 19, fn. 20). In ordinary parlance it is rendered into incarnation which we follow in the present paper.

⁽²⁾ *Bhagavatgītā*, chap. IV, v. 8.

Paritrānāya sadhūnām vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām

Dharme samsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge.

'To protect the peace-makers, to destroy the evil-mongers, / And to establish righteousness, [I will be] born aeon after aeon'.

⁽³⁾ The major incarnations are called *daśāvatāra* 'ten incarnations'. They are *Matsya* 'Fish', *Kūrma* 'Tortoise', *Varāha* 'Boar', *Nṛsimha* 'Man-Lion', *Vāmana* 'Dwarf', *Trivikrama*, *Paraśurāma*, *Śrī Rāma*, *Balarāma* or *Buddha*, *Kṛṣṇa* and *Kalki* (Basham 1971: 304-49).

⁽⁴⁾ According to the *Śrī Mahādēvī Bhāgavatam* the incarnations of Viṣṇu are twenty-six in all. In addition to the *daśāvatāra* noted above, the longer list includes *Sanaka*, *Sananda*, *Sanātana*, *Sanatkumāra*, *Nārada*, *Nara Nārāyaṇas*, *Kapila*, *Dattātreyā*, *Yajña*, *Rṣabha*, *Pṛthu*, *Mohinī*, *Garuḍa*, *Dhanvantari*, and *Vyāsa*.

⁽⁵⁾ *Aṁśāvatāra* is only a partial manifestation or incarnation of an *aṁśa* 'particle' of Viṣṇu (Zimmer 1951: 390). *Śrī Mahādēvī Bhāgavatam* gives a lengthy list of such partial incarnations (Mani 1975: 33).

⁽⁶⁾ It (*Piṅgalam*, 2: 140) omits *Pṛthu* and *Garuḍa* but includes *Ayakkirīvaṇ* (*Hayagrīva* in Sanskrit) and *Bauddhaṇ* (*Buddha*).

The aim of the present paper is to trace the mythological background of Viṣṇu's Mohinī *avatāras* and the iconography of Mohinī as gleaned from *Śilpa-śāstras* and *Purāṇas* and the application of Mohinī iconography in art. The paper consists of four parts, of which the first three are devoted to the theoretical aspects of the above mentioned Mohinī incarnation, which constitutes an entity in itself and dealing with literary and art forms. The fourth part is a separate entity dealing with an analytical interpretation of the Mohinī theme in the wake of certain sociological-sexological beliefs of the Hindus. It purports to prove that the Hindu society was not so hygienic as suggested by scholars like A.L. Basham (1971: 173) who concluded that aberrative sexual practices such as homosexuality were not popular among the Hindus. The present paper attempts to disprove the thesis of A.L. Basham in the light of the Mohinī theme in literature and art.

1. Mohinī Legends

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇam*, also known as *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, relates the story of the origin and activities of Mohinī. Once upon a time the *devas* 'gods' and *asuras* 'demons' who were like rats and cats in enmity entered into an alliance to churn the Tiruppārkkāḍal 'Ocean of Milk' with a view to obtaining the *amṛta*, which was supposed to make the consumer immortal, and share it among themselves. They used the mountain, Mantharā, as the churnstick and the snake, Vāsuki, as the churning rope. Viṣṇu himself in his form as *Kūrma* served as the pivot upon which the Mantharā rested. While the churning was in progress a deadly venom called *hālabāla* or *kālakūṭa* was emitted by Vāsuki. The demons and gods, dreading the ferocity of the venom invoked the aid of Śaṅkara 'Śiva', the God of Destruction in the Hindu Trinity, who gulped it down and saved the victims from destruction. When *kṣīrābhimanthanam* 'Churning the Ocean of Milk' was over, Dhanvantari emerged from the Ocean with the *amṛtaghaṭa* 'pot of ambrosia' in his hands. Immediately the deceitful demons, wilfully disregarding the contract, snatched the pot and ran away. The helpless gods did not know what to do and implored Viṣṇu to come to their rescue. Viṣṇu who decided to give tit for tat, assumed the form of a beautiful damsel, Mohinī, to deceive the demons by evoking their lustful feelings and to recover the *amṛta*. She proceeded to the spot where the demons were quarreling over how to share the *amṛta* among themselves. As expected, the demons lost their senses, enticed by the beauty of Mohinī. Hoping to win her favour, they entrusted the *amṛtaghaṭa* to her with a request to share it out. Mohinī agreed to do the job on condition that the nectar should also be distributed to the gods since they were eligible for a share and that the demons should not question whatever she might do by way of distribution. The demons, steeped in libidinous speculations to win the

hand of Mohinī, approved the conditions. By her sweet words, gestures and smile she beguiled the demons, and distributed the *amṛta* only among the gods. Thus the demons were deprived of their legitimate share of the *amṛta* because of their greediness. Then Viṣṇu disclosed his original form to the demons. All the gods applauded Viṣṇu for his sagacious and timely help. To praise Viṣṇu, Śiva went to the former's abode, Vaikuṇṭha, followed by his attendants. In eulogising terms, he requested Viṣṇu to show the Mohinī form once again so that he and his attendants could have the privilege of witnessing that glorious sight. To fulfill the wishes of Śiva, Viṣṇu once again appeared as Mohinī. The vision was so enchanting and enrapturing that Śiva lost himself in sexual urge and followed Mohinī to a secluded place forgetting all about his attendants and family. The impulse of infatuation forced Śiva to ejaculate semen profusely. All the surface on earth where Śiva's semen was deposited became mines of silver and gold. Then Śiva realised his folly and recovered completely from the spell of libido. Viṣṇu applauded him as the best among the gods who was able to withstand even the lure of Mohinī (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, chaps. 7-9).

The *Skanda Purāṇam* avers that Śiva not only lost himself in the beauty of Mohinī but also had sexual intercourse with her as a result of which a son by the name Hariharaputra (⁽⁷⁾) was born (⁽⁸⁾). The *Kāñchi Purāṇam* (*Mācāttaṇṇali Pataḷam*, vv. 23-24) of Śivañānasvāmigaḷ, a Tamil work of the 18th century A.D., attests the same information. The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇam* (4th-6th centuries A.D.) also has an interpolated episode relating to the birth of Sāsta through Mohinī (Arunachalam 1977: 33-34). A traditional view prevalent among orthodox scholars regarding the nature of Sāsta's birth is that the latter was born in the *kai* 'hand' of Mohinī since she received Śiva's semen in her hands. So it is said that one born in *kai* was called Kaiyaṇṇaṇ (Oppert 1972: 509). It is because of this illegal birth Sāsta came to be known as Marachaṇ 'the illegal Lord' in the Nāñjināḍu (Southern Travancore) region in Tamilnadu (Arunachalam 1977: 35-37).

Mohinī on another occasion is said to have paid a visit to the Dārūka forest along with Śiva. Dārūka was the abode of *ṛṣis* 'sages' who by immaculate and strenuous penance had acquired great spiritual and occult powers. They were very proud of their powers and were under the intoxicating impression that even gods like Śiva and Viṣṇu were no match for their prowess. To teach them a lesson, Viṣṇu as Mohinī and Śiva as Bhikṣāṭana went to Dārūka. Their lustre and youth-

(⁽⁷⁾) Hari stands for Viṣṇu and Hara for Śiva. *Putra* implies son. Hariharaputra was known variously as Sāsta, Ārya Sāsta, Dharma Sāsta, Aiyappaṇ, Aiyaṇār and so on.

(⁽⁸⁾) The *Kanda Purāṇam* (I, 2: 32) of Kacciyappa Śivāchārya, an adaptation of the Sanskrit original, the *Skanda Purāṇam* (7th-9th centuries A.D.), is assigned to various dates ranging from the 12th to the 17th centuries A.D. The most widely accepted date is the 14th century A.D.

fulness captivated all the *ṛṣis* and their *patnīs* 'wives' who followed Mohinī and Bhikṣāṭana respectively, steeped in lecherous thoughts. All of a sudden they realised that they were being deceived by the young couple and cursed them. They also waged a cunning war with Bhikṣāṭana but were ultimately defeated and humbled.

Mohinī is also connected with the destruction of a powerful demon called Bhasmāsura 'dust demon' ⁽⁹⁾. The latter was an invincible creature who by virtue of a boon from Śiva had the power to reduce one to ashes by placing his hands on the victim's head. When the boon was granted by Śiva, the demon wanted to test the efficacy of the boon by placing his hand on the head of Śiva himself. Chased by the demon, Śiva ran hither and thither and prayed to Viṣṇu to come to his aid. Viṣṇu appeared in the guise of Mohinī to distract the attention of the demon. On seeing Mohinī, the demon forgot all about Śiva and started wooing her. Mohinī cajoled him saying that she liked the demon very much and was prepared to fulfill his wishes, provided he came to her after a cleansing bath with his head smeared with oil. Accordingly the demon put oil on his head. Instantly he himself was turned to ashes (Oppert 1972: 508). According to another version of the myth, the demon went on imitating the various kinds of dance recitals enacted by Mohinī. At the climax of the recital, she placed both of her hands on her own head, which the demon imitated unfalteringly and was consumed by flames. In some Tamil ballads, it is said that Śiva fell in love with Mohinī only after this incident. When Śiva ejaculated semen at the climax of sexual passion, Mohinī caught the seeds in her hands. Sāsta was born in the hands of Mohinī (Arunachalam 1977: 33-34).

2. Iconography of Mohinī

Iconographically Mohinī is a simple theme. She is neither multi-armed nor multi-faced. Her images are thus not complex. She has no special symbols. Her hands are usually two in number and she holds a vase of nectar in one of them. Mohinī is a beautiful woman glowing with youthful lust. She wears colourful garments and is decked with ornaments (Gupte 1972: 35, 71).

The *Śilpaśāstras* do not treat Mohinī as an independent form. As a spouse she is associated with either Kaṅkālamūrti ⁽¹⁰⁾ or Bhikṣāṭana. She is expected to

⁽⁹⁾ It is said that there is no reference to Bhasmāsura in the *Purāṇas*. According to *Sivalilāmṛta*, a Marathi work, he was born out of the *bhasma* 'dust' on the body of Śiva (Mani 1975: 122).

⁽¹⁰⁾ Śiva as Bhikṣāṭana went to Vaikuṇṭha, Viṣṇu's abode, begging arms. Viṣvaksena, the gatekeeper, denied him entry. In a fit of anger Śiva kicked off the head of Viṣvaksena with his *triśūla* 'trident'. Due to *brahmahatti* 'sin of killing a Brahmana' the body of Viṣvaksena stuck to the trident. In this form Śiva is called Kaṅkālamūrti.

stand on the right side of Kaṅkālamūrti with a pot of food. She wears transparent garments, exhibiting her genitals (*Silparatna*, chap. 22, vv. 123-26). While dealing with the iconography of Bhikṣāṭana, the *Silpaśāstras* just state that all the attributes of Kaṅkālamūrti are applicable also to Bhikṣāṭana (*Silparatna*, chap. 22, v. 142). So Mohinī as described in connection with Kaṅkālamūrti is expected to be present also in the company of Bhikṣāṭana. Some of the *Silpaśāstras* just state that Kaṅkālamūrti is surrounded by women (*Sarasvatīyacitrakarmasāstra*, chap. 24, vv. 21-22). The women are supposed to be *ṛṣipatnīs* (*Agastyasakalā-dhikāra*, chap. 13, vv. 360-2).

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇam* writing about Mohinī as present in the company of demons states that she is a very beautiful young woman, noted for bodily lustre and youthful age. She has eyes resembling the petals of lotus. She is endowed with extraordinarily beautiful eyes and thighs which resemble the trunks of elephants. She is thin waisted. Her breasts are like water jugs. She wears a beautiful saree and anklets (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, VIII, chap. 7, vv. 1-2, 3, 6, 17). Mohinī in association with Śiva is described as a damsel playing with a ball. She wears a shining and slippery saree which is fastened with a belt. She has broad, captivating and ruthless eyes. Her breasts are tossing with animation. When Śiva underwent the high tide of his lusty emotions, Mohinī's garments blew away and she stood stark naked (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, VIII, chap. 12, vv. 18-20, 23).

Regarding the association of Mohinī with the Churning of Tiruppārkkāḍal or Bhaṣmāsura the *Silpaśāstras* have nothing to say.

3. Mohinī and Related Themes in Art

Churning Tiruppārkkāḍal and Mohinī are popularly represented in Indian and Eastern art ⁽¹¹⁾. Mohinī appears in connection with the following themes in art: (1) seduction of *ṛṣis*, (2) Mohinī in the company of Śiva as holding the lat-

(11) In the present paper Mohinī and related themes are treated with special reference to the wood carvings of Tamilnadu. The choice of wood carvings to illustrate the present theme is arbitrary since the author's area of specialisation happens to be the wood carvings of Tamilnadu. The choice is justifiable under the pretext that the wood carving of Tamilnadu is a hitherto unexplored area for survey and study. Some fifty specimens relating to the various aspects of the Mohinī myth have been traced from the various parts of Tamilnadu, mainly from the wooden *rathas* or *tērs* 'temple cars' which constitute the bulk of wooden monuments. The details pertaining to the whereabouts and location of these specimens are presented in the annex to the present paper. Whenever a reference to a particular specimen occurs in the text of the paper, the specimen numbers given for the specimens alone are given within brackets.

ter's genitals, (3) Śiva and Viṣṇu (Mohinī) swinging a cradle, (4) Mohinī in the company of Kaṅkālamūrti and (5) Mohinī with Bhaṣmāsura. All these indicate that in art forms all the three episodes (*supra*) connecting Mohinī and Śiva are popular. The absence of some of these forms in the *śilpa* texts for codification of iconic rules tends to suggest that a myth takes its manifestation first in Pūrāṇic literature, then in art portrayals and then in *Śilpaśāstras*. In the present case the theme under consideration has not undergone the third stage.

Churning the Ocean of Milk

It is a bold and heroic theme. Things such as a big mountain, a big snake, gigantic demons and so on are involved in the presentation of this theme. A colossal monument in harmony with the spirit of the theme comes from Angkor Thom (Kampuchea) where the whirling of Mantharā using a huge snake, Vāsuki, is presented with the gods and demons gripping the serpent in their hands ⁽¹²⁾ (Sivaramamurti 1970: pls. 3-4). In Tamilnadu the theme is mostly depicted in the *gopuras* 'temple gateways' which provide the spacious venue necessary for the depiction of this gigantic theme. One example of this is found in the Eastern *gopura* of the Sthāṇumalaya Perumāḷ Temple at Suchindram (Kanyākumari District). In the wooden temple cars also the theme is fairly well represented. Eleven specimens (Nos. 1 to 11) are presented in the miniature carvings in the temple cars. In most of them the *devas* and *asuras* are found holding the tail portion and head portion of Vāsuki, respectively (figs. 1-2). Vāsuki has the shape of a huge rope, encircling the Mantharā. In one (No. 2) Vāsuki is five-hooded, Mantharā is in the shape of a double-edged cone. In some specimens (Nos. 8 & 11) the hill resembles a Liṅga ⁽¹³⁾ at whose base lays the *kūrma*. The Liṅga resting on the circular *kūrma* is highly suggestive because in iconic representation the *āvaḍai* is usually circular in shape. The present illustration seems to suggest the female and male ethos of Viṣṇu and Śiva, respectively. Very rarely Viṣṇu himself appears as the mountain (fig. 2). It could have been an innovation of the ingenious and repulsive Vaiṣṇava artist who wanted to present Viṣṇu himself as the Male Principle. In this connection it may be noted that most of the Mohinī and related themes are traceable from Śiva temples (79.3%, 42/53) and their aim is to exalt the place of Śiva before Viṣṇu. The demons in most of the illustrations appear as virile, sturdy creatures. Some of them are in therian-

⁽¹²⁾ A similar monument comes from Angkor Vat (Kampuchea) which is a miniature panel by comparison (Lee n.d.: 239, fig. 304). Both the monuments under consideration belong to the early medieval period.

⁽¹³⁾ Liṅga 'phallus' is the object of adoration in Śiva temples. It represents the male genital organ which in iconic presentation rests on a circular pedestal called *āvaḍai* 'vagina'. Their merger is a typical symbolism of sexual union (Sen 1972: 35).

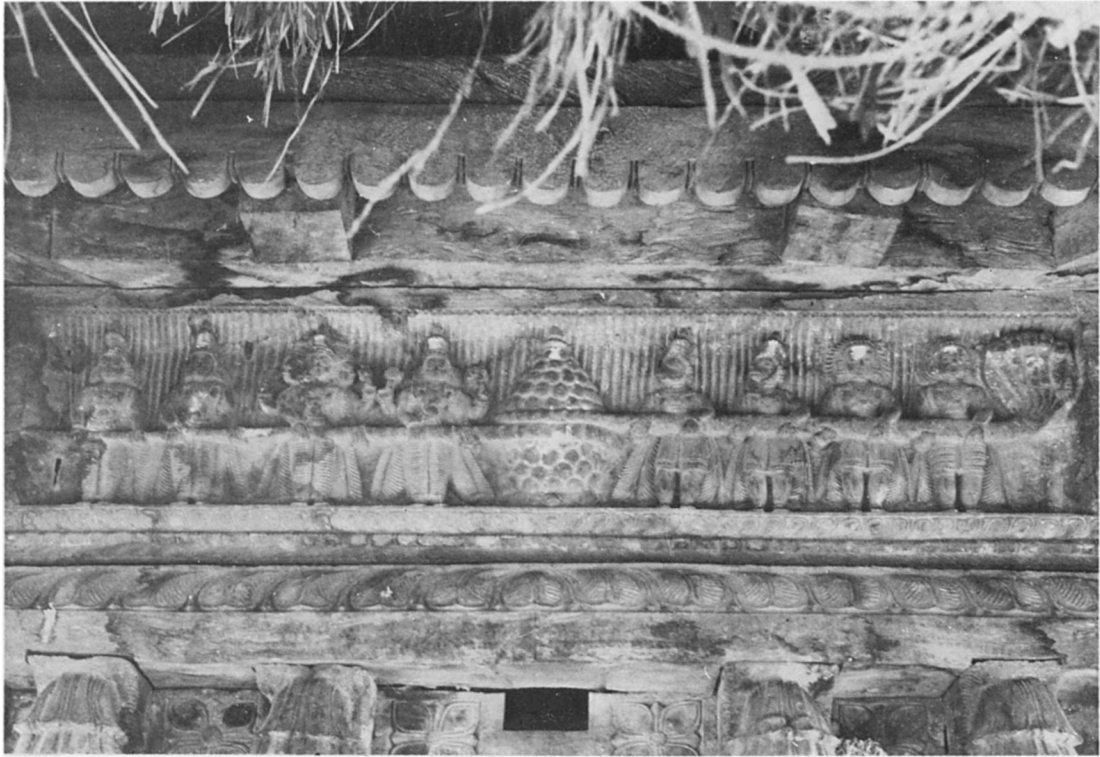


Fig. 1 - Churning the Ocean of Milk, Gaṅgādiśvara Temple Car, Chinna Salem.

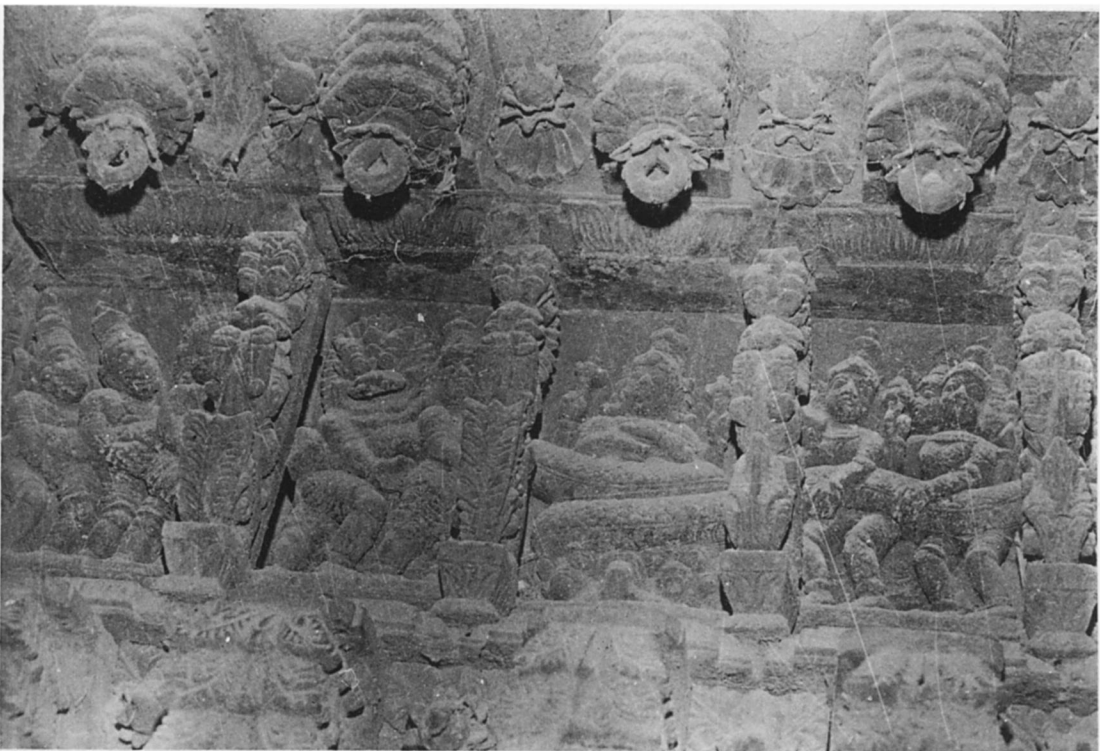


Fig. 2 - Churning the Ocean of Milk, Tirukkāmeśvara Temple, Gaṇapati Car, Villiyānūr.

thropic form with a lion or horse head and human body. The gods appear benign and effeminate. Among the gods, Brahmā, the Hindu God of Creation, and Viṣṇu are found in some specimens. Viṣṇu is four-armed (No. 2) and bears the *śaṅkha* 'conch' and *cakra* 'disc' in his rear hands while the two front hands are holding Vāsuki. Brahmā is also four-armed (Nos. 2 & 11) and bears the *ka-maṇḍalū* 'water jug' and *akṣamālā* 'rosary' in his back hands while the front hands are in the same pose as Viṣṇu.

In a unique specimen (No. 8) Nīlakaṇṭha⁽¹⁴⁾, Pārvatī and Ālālasundara⁽¹⁵⁾ are found to be present in the *amṛtamanthana* 'churning for ambrosia' panel whose presence is not traceable in the same theme elsewhere. In it Śiva is seated in *sukhāsana*. He is four-armed. But three hands alone are visible, one being hidden by the standing figure of Pārvatī. Śiva's back left hand bears the *mrga* 'antelope'. The front left hand is in *varada mudrā*. The front right hand is receiving the poison, which ascends like a stream from below the motif depicting *amṛtamanthana* (fig. 3). Pārvatī stands to his right⁽¹⁶⁾, leaning towards Śiva and holding his neck tightly with both her hands. Ālālasundara stands to the left of Śiva with hands folded in *añjali hasta* as a mark of respect⁽¹⁷⁾. All the three are wearing *karaṇḍa makutas*. The expression on the face of Śiva suggests that he is tasting something bitter. This is in agreement with the version of the *Śrī-tatvanidhi* (Pt. I 3: 61), the *Śilpāśāstra*, which observes that the face of Śiva should be like that of a mad elephant consuming poison.

Mohinī and Śiva

Six specimens in the temple cars (Nos. 12 to 17) depict the intercourse of Mohinī with Śiva. In one (No. 12) Mohinī stands gracefully with her left leg

⁽¹⁴⁾ Nīlakaṇṭha 'the blue throated one' is so called since the venom emitted by Vāsuki was swallowed by him terrifying his consort, Pārvatī, who hastened to hold his neck tightly, preventing the poison from descending and having its effects. Due to the evil effects of the poison, remaining in the neck itself, the throat became blue in colour and hence the appellation. He is also called Viṣāpaharaṇamūrti 'he who seized the poison to drink it' and Viṣāharamūrti 'one who removed or grasped the poison' (*Śrī-tatvanidhi*, Pt. I, 3: 61). He is also known as Śrīkaṇṭha 'the she-throated' and Viṣakaṇṭha 'the poison-throated'.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Ālālasundara was a page attending on Śiva. It was he who collected the poison when discharged by Vāsuki and handed it over to his master and is thus called Ālālasundara. *Ālabālam* is a Tamilised form of *bālabāla*. Ālālasundara appears very rarely in iconographical specimens.

⁽¹⁶⁾ According to the *Kāraṇāgama* she should stand to the left of Śiva (Sastri 1916: 140).

⁽¹⁷⁾ He seems to be four-armed since a hand is found projecting upwards from behind the front left hand (fig. 3). If so, it cannot be an attendant since attendants and better-halves in the company of their lords usually have two hands only. If the figure in question is a four-armed one, it may represent Viṣṇu because the object held in the back left hand appears to be *śaṅkha*. He is perhaps present here to witness the feat performed by Śiva.

placed firmly on the ground while the right leg is slightly lifted in *kuñcita* attitude and thrown across the standing leg. She holds (fig. 4A) a bunch of flowers (?) in her hands. The infatuated Śiva stands in front of her ⁽¹⁸⁾. In the adjoining panel (fig. 4B), both Śiva and Mohinī are found manipulating each other's sexual organs. Both of them are fully under the spell of libido. Śiva is four handed. He bears the *mṛga* and *ṭaṅka* 'chisel' in his back hands. With his front hands Śiva caresses Mohinī's breasts. Mohinī holds Śiva's genitals in her hands. This panel justifies the concept that Hariharaputra was born in the hands of Mohinī. In another rare panel (No. 13) the same theme is portrayed. Mohinī stands to the left of Śiva, leaning slightly forward. The left leg is slightly retracted with the heel lifted while the fingers are touching the ground. She is endowed with alluring thighs recalling the description of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇam* wherein Mohinī's thighs are said to resemble the trunks of elephants (*supra*). Mohinī holds Śiva's genitals as though to receive something (fig. 5). Obviously Mohinī is having Śiva's semen deposited in her palms. Śiva is four handed and bears the *mṛga* and *ṭaṅka* in back hands. The front right hand is in *abhaya mudrā*. The front left hand is not visible. Both Śiva and Mohinī are wearing *skandhamālās*. Śiva is quite naked while Mohinī is in underclothes. A rare panel (No. 15) depicts both Śiva and Viṣṇu in the act of swinging a cradle (fig. 12). Viṣṇu stands holding the swing in his front hands while the back right hand bears the *cakra*. Śiva stands nearly. The baby, Hariharaputra, is perhaps inside cradle. In the present illustration instead of Mohinī, the original Viṣṇu himself is presented in a theme portraying the aftermath of the Mohinī-Śiva liaison.

Mohinī and Kaṅkālamūrti

In the panels depicting Kaṅkālamūrti ⁽¹⁹⁾ one (No. 19) or more (No. 18) ladies are present. The ladies are looking at Kaṅkālamūrti in admiration. They are wearing transparent garments. They hold a ladle in one of their hands. It is likely that they represent Mohinī since the *Śilpaśāstras* call them the better-half of Kaṅkālamūrti ⁽²⁰⁾ (fig. 6).

⁽¹⁸⁾ In the specimen plated (fig. 4A) Śiva is missing.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Kaṅkālamūrti is a standing *samabhaṅga* image with the right leg alone slightly raised in *kuñcita* attitude. He is four-handed. The back left hand holds a long *triśūla* placed on the shoulder. The front left hand holds a *kapāla* 'skull'. The front right hand holds a bunch of grass which an antelope is browsing. The back right hand holds a *kaṅkāla* 'small drum'. It is because of this he is called Kaṅkālamūrti. By his side stands a dwarf demon with a vessel on the head. For the iconographical details of Kaṅkālamūrti see *Sarasvatīyaci-trakarmaśāstra* (chap. 24), *Agastyasakalādhikāra* (chap. 13), and *Kāśyapaśilpaśāstra* (*Paṭalam* 75).

⁽²⁰⁾ The ladle carried by the ladies indicate that they may as well be *ṛṣipatnīs* who were supposed to feed the mendicant. The fact that more than one lady is present also supports this.



Fig. 3 - Churning the Ocean of Milk and Nilakaṇṭha, Saptarṣiśvara Temple, Svāmi Car, Lālgudi.

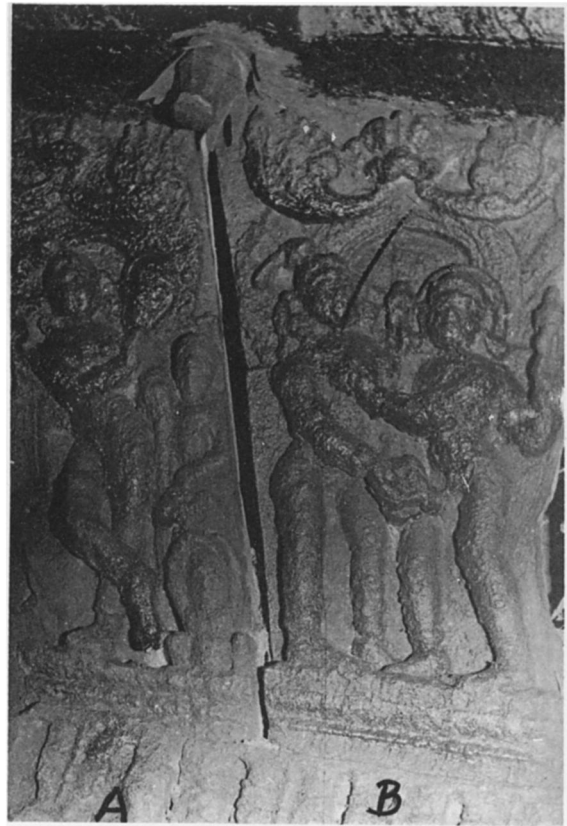


Fig. 4 - (A) Mohinī, (B) Mohinī and Śiva engaged in amorous play; Koḷundālamman Temple Car, Pullambādi.

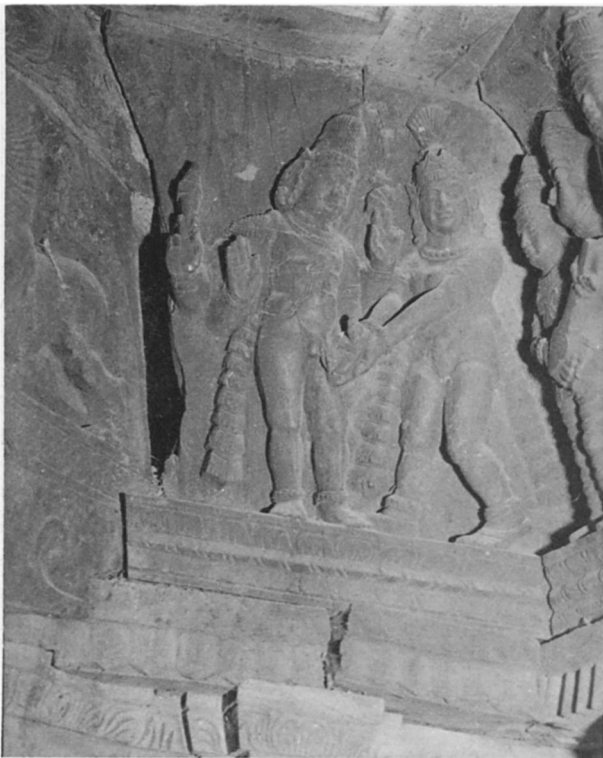


Fig. 5 - Mohinī and Śiva during amorous play, Śikhāgiriśvara Temple, Amman Car, Kuḍumiyāmalai.

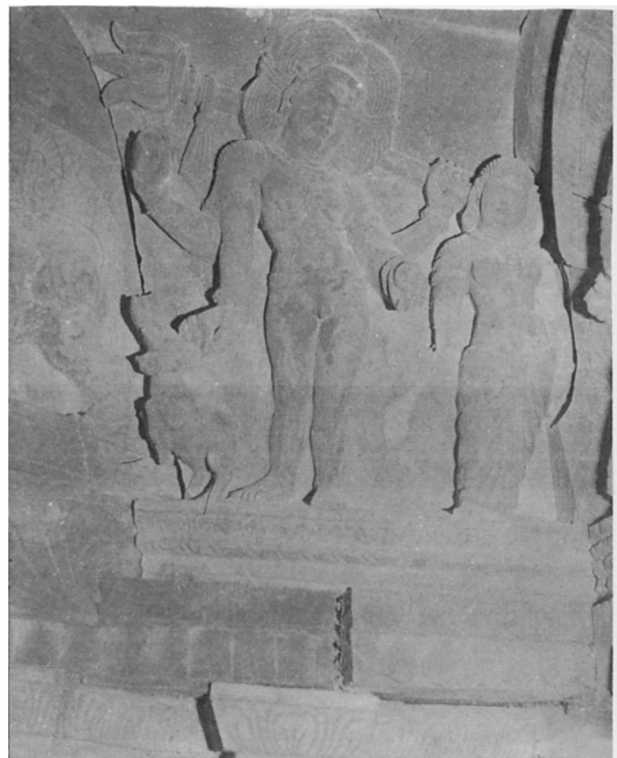


Fig. 6 - Kaṅkālamūrti and Mohinī, Śikhāgiriśvara Temple, Amman Car, Kuḍumiyāmalai.

Mohinī with R̥sis

Mohinī making fun in the exultant company of r̥sis is a very popular theme in art (Nos. 20-44). In most of these panels Mohinī is presented as a gigantic figure surrounded by a host of pigmy r̥sis (fig. 7). In most specimens she is stark naked. In exceptional cases Mohinī appears partly nude but clearly exhibiting her genitals so as to attract the r̥sis. The r̥sis look at Mohinī with wonder as though they have met an unearthly beauty. They make all sorts of pretentious actions to win her favour. Some of them raise their hands above their heads with folded palms in *añjali bandha* to mean surrender. Some hold the feet of Mohinī and massage them so that Mohinī may cast her gracious looks on them. Some hold their genitals in their own hands, unable to dispel lustful sentiments and win over Mohinī by exhibiting their manliness. In a remarkable specimen (No. 38) Mohinī catches hold of the beard of a libidinous r̥si with one hand and knuckles him with the other hand while the sage who is supposed to have renounced mundane pleasures is seen to be holding his own genitals in one hand and a *danda* 'staff' ⁽²¹⁾ in another hand (fig. 8). In one (No. 43) Mohinī is dancing naked while the r̥sis are in an ecstatic mood playing musical instruments.

Mohinī with Bhasmāsura

The panels portraying Bhasmāsura and Mohinī present the demon as either wooing the nymph or as being caught by conflagration. Mohinī stands partly bedecked with transparent garments and some ornaments like anklets. She holds a lotus (No. 53) or a bunch of flowers (No. 51) in her left hand. She wears sandals and is in a gracious walking pose with her left leg firmly on the ground and her right leg in *kuñcita* attitude (No. 51). Her face is turned back non-chalantly but at the same time intentionally, to capture the attention of the demon. Bhasmāsura stands behind her in *tribhaṅga* ⁽²²⁾ or *atibhaṅga* attitude with the hands lifted above the head (fig. 9). In most of the specimens Bhasmāsura is placing his hands on his head. Fire consumes the demon from below (fig. 11). This indicates that the dance theme making the demon put his hands on his own head was more popular with sculptures than the other versions of the destruction of Bhasmāsura.

4. Sexological Background of Mohinī-Siva Liaison

Some comments upon the nature of the sexual relationship between Mohinī and Śiva state that it was 'incestuous' (Oppert 1972: 509). Man having sexual

⁽²¹⁾ It is a characteristic weapon of the anchorite.

⁽²²⁾ Dancing images are expected to be so (Acharya 1927: 446-47).



Fig. 7 - Mohinī with pigmy ṛṣi, Śrī Āṇḍāl Temple Car, Srīvilliputtūr.



Fig. 8 - Mohinī knuckling ṛṣi, Subrahmaṇya Temple, Paṅguni Car, Kuṇḍrakkuḍi.

intercourse with one of his own sex is contrary to the natural order, animal behaviour and social acceptance. In the Mohinī-Śiva myth, Kacciappa Śivāchārya raises the issue through Viṣṇu himself who asks Śiva, when the latter expressed his desire to unite with the former, 'whether it would be dignified for a man to have sexual intercourse with a man' ⁽²³⁾. Śiva replied to Viṣṇu that the latter was none but his own *śakti* ⁽²⁴⁾. Śiva justified his claim by pointing out instances when Viṣṇu admittedly served him as a *śakti*: (1) during the visit to Dāruka,

⁽²³⁾ *Kanda Purāṇam*, 2: 32: 34.

... āḍavar āḍavarōḍu cērn
Din̄ba meidi yirundaṇar illaiyāl
Muṇbu kēṭṭadu mandru mudalva nī
Vinbodeṇṇaip puṇarvadu māṭciyō.

⁽²⁴⁾ Literally energy, it stands for betterhalf.



Fig. 9 - Mohinī and Bhaṣmāsura, Soumya Nārāyaṇa Perumāl Temple Car, Tirukkōṣṭiyūr.



Fig. 10 - Homosexuality: Oral Congress, Subrahmanya Temple Car, Malaikkōyil (Coimbatore District).



Fig. 11 - Mohinī and Bhasmāsura, Sikhāgiriśvara Temple, Ammaṇ Car, Kuḍumiyāmalai.



Fig. 12 - Śiva-Viṣṇu swing Cradle, Mayūra-nātha Temple Car, Peddavanalūr (Rāmanāthapuram Dt.).

Viṣṇu (Mohinī) served as Śiva's (Bhikṣāṭana) better-half and (2) when Viṣṇu gave birth to Brahmā through the lotus emanating from his navel ⁽²⁵⁾, the father was none other but Śiva (*Kanda Purāṇam*, 2: 32: 35-36). Śivañānasvāmigaḷ makes Viṣṇu himself acknowledge his femininity (*Kāñchi Purāṇam*, *Mācāttanṇali Patalam*, v. 7). It is argued that Viṣṇu assumed the form of Mohinī to deceive the demons but the episode relating to the birth of Sāsta proves Śiva's manliness and Viṣṇu's femininity ⁽²⁶⁾. Viṣṇu is a male deity in the Hindu pantheon, like his counterpart, Śiva. The attempts to make him a female seem to have been made for the purpose of making him appear inferior to Śiva ⁽²⁷⁾. It is also probable that the myth-makers wanted to create a God Superior, i.e., Sāsta, which could only be accomplished by making the greatest gods like Śiva and Viṣṇu fuse their energies into one. Whatever the mythological justification behind the union of Śiva and Viṣṇu may be, it involves a sociological question relating to sexual intercourse between two male deities. So it will not be faulty to observe that the Mohinī-Śiva liaison is a clear case of homosexuality wherein a deliberate attempt to brand it heterosexuality has been made by projecting Viṣṇu as the Female Principle ⁽²⁸⁾.

In ancient India homosexuality was much abhorred in literature and art. The society did not encourage it. So historians feel that India which condemned such unhygienic methods of sexual intercourse was 'far healthier than most other ancient cultures' (Basham 1971: 173). The *Kāmasūtra* of Vātsyāyana writes about homosexual methods discouragingly and warns that men of reputation should not involve themselves in such affairs (Upadhyaya 1970: 132). The discourse on oral congress as found in the *Kāmasūtra* proves beyond doubt that homosexuality was not totally unknown to ancient India. The fact was that it was not encouraged. That was all. It seems to have gained a hold in the medieval period after the 11th century A.D. The Mohinī-Śiva liaison seems to be the first homosexual theme ever admitted in Purāṇic accounts. It is likely that it

⁽²⁵⁾ The iconographical presentation of the theme is called Śeṣaśāyī in which Viṣṇu reclines on the primeval serpent, Śeṣa, with a lotus issuing from his navel where Brahma is seated (Rao 1971: I, Pt. I, 91-96; Desai 1973: 24-30, figs. 21, 23, 25).

⁽²⁶⁾ The poet adds that Viṣṇu felt shy when Śiva approached him. Śiva held him tightly with all the aggressiveness of a man and embraced him. Viṣṇu like a frail person, meekly submitted. These sentiments, characteristic of the two sexes, are portrayed to assert the masculine and feminine roles taken by the partners engaged in sexual intercourse.

⁽²⁷⁾ Most of the Śaivite *Purāṇams* such as *Kanda Purāṇam* and *Kāñchi Purāṇam* exalt Śiva by denigrating Viṣṇu. This was mainly due to the sectarian rivalry exhibited by Śaivites and Vaiṣṇavites in the middle ages. These bickerings had their impact not only on mythological compositions but also on the development of iconography (Kalidos 1980: 213, 216).

⁽²⁸⁾ In fact it is a case of 'transsexuality'. Presenting Viṣṇu as Mohinī in female attire is an attempt at 'transvestitism'.



Fig. 13 - Homosexuality: fellatio, *Kalyāṇamaṇḍapam*, Subrahmanya Temple, Tirupparankunram.

took place only after the 11th century A.D. as the ethical aspects pertaining to it are briefly discussed in the *Kanda Purāṇam* ⁽²⁹⁾.

By associating the great gods of the Hindu pantheon, such as Śiva and Viṣṇu,

⁽²⁹⁾ It could have been an impact of Muhammadan culture. Homosexuality was quite a familiar affair with them. Some of the Muhammadan rulers of Delhi even maintained a serraglio consisting of males or eunuchs. Even now in the Arab countries the trade in male flesh is very common.

a kind of religious sanction was given to sexual practices hitherto considered as immoral and unsocial ⁽³⁰⁾. In his attempt to vindicate the sexual behaviour of Śiva, Kacciyappa Śivāchārya has made an attempt to justify homosexuality itself ⁽³¹⁾. Having obtained the literary sanction which was necessary to canvass public opinion, the homosexual theme made its first entry in art forms during the later Vijayanagar period after the 16th century A.D. ⁽³²⁾. In this sociological process the Mohinī-Śiva liaison played a substantial role.

The basic necessity involved in sexual intercourse is procreation. In nature itself provision is made for it. Animals mate as a response to a biological urge which results in the propagation of the species. But in the case of human beings sex is viewed not merely as a biological urge but also with some religious tinge and ethical values. Therefore sex is either elevated to sublimity or debased to bestiality. When sex is aimed at the proliferation of the human race, it is viewed as a noble act. When it is meant for quenching the lower appetite, it is viewed with disfavour. Perversion of sex or aberration is also to be measured within a context free from value-judgments. Relative terms such as good and bad, noble

⁽³⁰⁾ There are other evidences to prove the existence of homosexuality in the medieval period. *Siddhas*, a class of Tamil sages and demi-gods in *Purāṇams*, considered that by swallowing semen one could rejuvenate himself and attain immortality (Zvelebil 1973: 79, 140-41). Tirumūlar, a Tamil *siddha* (11th century A.D.?), calls it *amuri* or *śivanir* 'Śiva's water' (*Tirumandiram*, v. 826). This indicates that a kind of therapy involving homosexuality was known to the *Siddhas*. A number of panels depicting sages, possibly *Siddhas*, with their phalluses directed towards their own mouths, or one sucking his own phallus or one holding another man's phallus are found in the temple cars (figs. 10, 14). These also confirm the prevalence of homosexual practices under the pretext of therapy or cult orgy.

⁽³¹⁾ Perhaps he was inspired by the esoteric practices of the *Siddhas* and was himself one among them, though no attempt has so far been made to identify him as a *siddha*.

⁽³²⁾ The *kalyāṇamandapam* 'marriage pavilion' of the Subrahmaṇya Temple at Tirupparaṅkunram (Madurai District) houses some sculptures on homosexual themes in its pillars in the front line. Men like acrobats are found standing one above the other. The phallus of the man standing below ascends high in *ūrdhva* 'erect perpendicularly' pose and reaches the mouth of the other man standing on the former's shoulder (fig. 13A). In the *mukha-mandapam* 'front pavilion' of the same temple similar motifs are found. In one homosexuality and heterosexuality are mingled. A man standing below holds his phallus in *ūrdhva* pose which a man in inverted posture has drawn into his mouth. His phallus in turn stands erect which a woman standing above all has inserted into her vagina (fig. 13B). In another motif a man stands below in *ālīḍhāsana*, holding his *ūrdhvaliṅga* in hands. A woman standing on his shoulder has it drawn into her *āvaḍai*. Another man stands upon her whose *ūrdhvaliṅga* is inserted into the *āvaḍai* of the woman standing upon his shoulder in turn. In this case the *liṅga* peeps through the mouth of the woman standing at the top and ascends high in *ūrdhva* posture. Above all is depicted a temple in which the bachelor god, Gaṇapati, is enshrined. In this panel the *ūrdhvaliṅga* seems to point out the quintessence of Tantric philosophy that *bhoga*, heterosexual (or also homosexual?), leads to the Ultimate Reality.

and ignoble or moral and immoral do not have any uniform universal application. What is deemed unsocial and abhorrent in one society may not be in another society. In the lower animals procreation dominates more in sexual behaviour than pleasure. So aberrative practices like homosexuality are unpopular with them. But man in his curiosity had not only sophisticated sex by inventing various poses of intercourse ⁽³³⁾ but also went beyond the natural order and made it possible even for two positives or two negatives to meet. Here the motive was pleasure and not procreation. Dominated by the quest for pleasure, man was more particular about pleasure than the sex of the partners engaged in the act. So aberrative practices like homosexuality and bestiality became more



Fig. 14 - Man sucking his own phallus, Chintāmaṇināthar Temple Car, Vāsudēvanallūr (Tirunelvēli Dt.).

⁽³³⁾ Such as the sixty four techniques of sexual union described by the Hindus.

popular with *Homo sapiens*. But these practices could not be practised openly by the social animals due to religious and ethical notions or legal complications.

From the above study what the author wants to conclude (from his own impression of the subject in its various representations in mythology, art and social values) is that the Hindus, especially the sages and seers at a higher plane in the social cadre, had viewed sexual union as a symbolic merger of the souls, metaphorically signifying the merger of *jīvātmas* with *paramātma* at the time of *pralaya* 'final deluge'. In this attempt they had no restraint in viewing human beings of either sex and animals as feathers of the same plumage. All are souls and it is the union of souls that matters in ritual and cult orgy. So heterosexuality, homosexuality and bestiality are all the different denominators of united souls that the civilized society has chosen to demarcate but for the *sādhus* all the denominators are one and the same in as far as they stand for the union of souls.

The historian can thus not pass any judgment regarding the vindication of homosexuality as a sin or blessing since it all depends upon the social concepts of a people living in a particular place at a particular time. He cannot say what is right or wrong for mankind as a whole. Viewed in this perspective, homosexuality was practised in ancient India with some inhibitions which were due to the fear of social denunciation while attempts to eradicate the inhibitions were made in the medieval period through literary accounts, *Purāṇas* and *Silpaśāstras*, and their application in art forms. The Mohini 'Viṣṇu' and Śiva liaison served as the best example in this respect. In this process of socio-morphosis the tantric cults such as those of the school of *Siddhas* played their part, coming forward to approve homosexuality on the grounds of therapy by highlighting ambitious goals such as immortality.

APPENDIX

LOCATION OF IMAGES CITED IN THE TEXT

specimen number	name of car (*)	location of images (**)		Name of the Temple	Place	District
		side	tier			
AMRTAMANTHANAM						
1	Amman	Back	III	Māriamman	Thānippādi	Chengalpattu
2	Svāmi	Right	III	Gaṅgādīśvara	Chinna Salem	North Arcot
3	Viṣṇu	— do —	II	Varadarāja	Panruṭṭi	— do —
4	Svāmi	Back	II	Sevantiśvara	Sirāppalli	Salem
5	Amman	— do —	III	Māriamman	Nāmagiripēṭṭai	— do —
6	— do —	Front	II	— do —	Uḍumalaipeṭṭai	Coimbatore
7	— do —	Right	II	Kumbheśvara	Kumbhakōṇam	Thaṇjāvūr
8	Svāmi	— do —	I	Saptaṛṣiśvara	Lālguḍi	Tiruchirāppalli
9	Cittirai	— do —	III	Śrī Raṅganātha	Śrīraṅgam	— do —
10	Viṣṇu	— do —	II	Śrī Āṇḍāl	Śrīvilliputtūr	Rāmanāthapuram
11	Gaṇapati	Left	III	Tirukkāmeśvara	Villiyānūr	Pondicherry
MOHINĪ WITH ŚIVA						
12	Amman	Right	II	Koḷundālamman	Puḷḷambādi	Tiruchirāppalli
13	— do —	— do —	II	Śikhāgiriśvara	Kuḍumiyāmalai	Pudukkōṭṭai
14	Amman	Right	II	— do —	— do —	— do —
15	Svāmi	— do —	II	Mayūranātha	Peddavanallūr	Rāmanāthapuram
16	— do —	Front	II	Kāśi Viśvanātha	Ambāsamudram	Tirunelvēli
17	— do —	— do —	II	Tirumūlanātha	— do —	— do —

(*) Some of the Śiva, Amman, Viṣṇu and Muruga temples possess more than one car. The additional cars are distinguished either by the names of the deities to whom the cars are dedicated or the months in which the cars are used. Svāmi 'Śiva', Amman, Viṣṇu, Muruga, Caṇḍeśa, Gaṇapati and Aiyaṇār denote deities. *Cittirai*, *Māci* and *Paṅguṇi* denote the Tamil months. The present annexure is from Kalidos (1981: 397-98).

(**) The side to which ropes are attached to pull the car is the Front side. The rear side of the cars is denoted as Back. Right and Left are the sides which lie to the left and right of a man if he stands facing the front side of the car. All the four sides have three tiers of sculptures, arranged in horizontal rows. That which lies immediately above the axle is tier I. The one resting on tier I is tier II, which is usually tapered. Tier III rests on tier II and culminates in the pedestal of the car (Kalidos 1984: fig. 1).

specimen number	name of car	location of images		Name of the Temple	Place	District
		side	tier			

MOHINĪ WITH KANKĀLAMŪRTI

18	Ammaṇ	Left	I	Nandikeśvara	Turaiyūr	Tiruchirāppalli
19	— do —	Back	II	Śikhāgiriśvara	Kuḍumiyāmalai	Pudukkōṭṭai

MOHINĪ WITH ṚṢIS

20	Viṣṇu	Left	I	Pārthasārathi	Tiruvallikkēṇi	Madras
21	— do —	Back	I	Ādi Keśava	Śrīperumpudūr	Cheṅgalpaṭṭu
22	— do —	Right	I	Lakṣmī Nṛsimha	Siṅgaperumāḷkōyil	— do —
23	— do —	Left	I	Ardhanārīśvara	Tiruchcheṅgōḍu	Salem
24	— do —	— do —	I	Lakṣmī Nṛsimha	Sēdamaṅgalam	— do —
25	Muruga	— do —	I	Subrahmaṇya	Aḷagumalai	Coimbatore
26	Ammaṇ	Right	I	Paccaināyakiammaṇ	Kolappalūr	Periyār
27	Viṣṇu	Left	I	Cakrapāṇi	Kumbhakōṇam	Thaṅjāvūr
28	Svāmi	Right	II	Abhimukheśvara	— do —	— do —
29	Muruga	— do —	I	Subrahmaṇya	Eṇkaṇ	— do —
30	Svāmi	— do —	I	Bhāskareśvara	Parudiyapparkōyil	— do —
31	Viṣṇu	— do —	I	Santāna Rāma	Niḍamaṅgalam	— do —
32	Svāmi	— do —	I	Navanīteśvara	Sikkal	— do —
33	Svāmi	Right	I	Tyāgarāja	Tiruvārūr	Thaṅjāvūr
34	Caṇḍeśa	— do —	II	— do —	— do —	— do —
35	Muruga	Front	II	Bālasubrahmaṇya	Puñjai Puhālūr	Tiruchirāppalli
36	Svāmi	Right	I	Simhapurīśvara	Karuppattūr	— do —
37	Gaṇapati	— do —	II	Bṛhadāmbāl	Tirugokarṇam	Pudukkōṭṭai
38	Paṅguṇi	— do —	III	Subrahmaṇya	Kunḍrakkuḍi	Rāmanāthapuram
39	Svāmi	— do —	II	Somanātha	Māṇāmadurai	— do —
40	Viṣṇu	Right	II	Śrī Āṇḍāl	Śrīvilliputtūr	— do —
41	Svāmi	Back	I	Tirumūlanātha	Ambāsamudram	Tirunelvēli
42	— do —	Right	I	Vilvavaṇanātha	Kaḍayam	— do —
43	Māci	Left	I	Ādinātha	Ālvārtirunagari	— do —
44	Ammaṇ	Right	I	Kumariammaṇ	Kanyākumari	Kanyākumari

MOHINĪ WITH BHASMĀSURA

45	Muruga	Left	I	Tirumuruganātha	Tirumurugaṇpūṇḍi	Coimbatore
46	— do —	— do —	II	Daṇḍāyudhapāṇi	Siravaṇapuram	— do —
47	Svāmi	Back	I	Amṛtaghaṭeśvara	Tirukkaḍaiyūr	Thaṅjāvūr

specimen number	name of car	location of images		Name of the Temple	Place	District
		side	tier			
48	— do —	Front	I	Kāmpahareśvara	Tirubhuvanam	— do —
49	Muruga	Right	I	Tyāgarāja	Tiruvārūr	— do —
50	Ammaṇ	Left	II	Saptaṣṣīśvara	Lālgudi	Tiruchirāppalli
51	Gaṇapati	— do —	II	— do —	— do —	— do —
52	Aiyaṇār	Right	II	Aiyaṇār	Pūvālūr	— do —
53	Ammaṇ	Right	II	Śikhāgiriśvara	Kuḍumiyāmalai	Pudukkōṭṭai

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The Female Lingam: Interchangeable Symbols and Paradoxical Associations of Hindu Gods and Goddesses [and Comments and Reply]

Author(s): Gabriella Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi, Arjun Appadurai, Agehananda Bharati, Ronald L. Campbell, Jules De Leeuwe, I. C. Jarvie, Sudhir Kakar, R. S. Khare, Weston La Barre, Deryck O. Lodrick, John L. McCreery, Balaji Mundkur, Jacob Pandian, Geoffrey Samuel, Dan Sperber and Howard F. Stein

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The Female *Lingam*: Interchangeable Symbols and Paradoxical Associations of Hindu Gods and Goddesses

by Gabriella Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi

SYMBOLISM has long been a favourite subject of research among students of the sciences of man and has received the most varied and often contradictory interpretations. The main controversy is that between the psychoanalytic school, which asserts that we cannot help attributing certain meanings to at least some symbols, and the structuralist school, which stresses the arbitrariness of all symbols, Sperber (1975:84) even speaking of "the absurd idea that symbols mean."

According to Freud (1962[1900]:359), "imagination does not admit of long stiff objects and weapons as symbols of the female genitals or of hollow objects, such as chests, cases, boxes etc. being used as symbols for the male ones." Jung (1964:67) is equally convinced of the inborn quality of certain symbolic representations, although he defines his archetypes not as ready-made images, but as the consequences of an instinctive tendency to represent for ourselves certain motives. Fromm (1962 [1951]:20, 24) echoes Jung's view of symbols as cultural heritage; for him they are even "humanity's forgotten language." While conceding that the particular meaning of a symbol can only be determined through its global context, he nevertheless speaks of universal symbols rooted in the experience of every human being.

I wish to refute this rigidly deterministic idea. In my opinion, the only true mental universals are to be found in language and in the related field of kinship systems and terminology. Even

there, however, determinism is rarely absolute; some theoretical possibilities are ruled out, but a few alternatives remain, and most linguistic universals are, in fact, implicational.¹ Rather than postulating an innate drive to choose certain symbols and to endow them with a certain kind of meaning as many psychoanalysts do, I should like to make a case for an element of caprice in the use of symbols. In order to explain simultaneously the frequency of some symbolic meanings and the lack of true mental constraints, I propose the similes of "highways" and "scenic routes" of symbolic thought in our brains. Most of us will take advantage of the "highways"—will choose certain objects as symbols and preferentially attribute certain meanings to these symbols. Apart from the fact, however, that nothing obliges us to travel along any "route" of symbolic thought—we may see an object simply as what it is, without attaching any symbolic meaning to it—we always have the possibility of avoiding the "highway" and taking a "scenic route." There are, of course, innumerable "scenic routes," some public and some private, leading in directions totally different from that of the "highway." Among these it is the special case of the "scenic *opposite* route," offering unexpected and exciting views, which forms the main subject of this study.

For the structuralist, my argument of interchangeable symbols may seem to force open doors. According to the structuralist school of thought, symbols acquire their meanings only in the context of a myth, a rite, a social setting, etc. I do not deny that context is important for the interpretation of symbols, and in some of the examples given below the meaning of the symbol does indeed change with the context. In other cases, however, context is irrelevant; the symbol may have the same meaning in different contexts and different meanings in the same context. This statement may also seem commonplace, since Lévi-Strauss (1971:564) has established that inverted myths may have identical meanings and identical myths may have inverted meanings. Mythological reversals in the structural sense, however, are always reversals of correlations, while in the case of the Hindu symbols I am dealing with it is the meaning of the *individual element* which is inverted, without entailing the inversion of the whole context. Perhaps the word "context"

¹ For example, any language that has a dual inflectional category has a plural inflectional category, but not necessarily vice versa (Greenberg 1968:140). There remains the choice between having a dual inflectional category and not having one.

GABRIELLA EICHINGER FERRO-LUZZI is an unofficial research worker at the Institute of Anthropology of the University of Rome and a teacher of Tamil in the university's Institute of Linguistics (mailing address: Via Mario Fascetti, 67, 00136 Roma, Italy). Born in 1931, she was educated at the University of Mainz (diploma in modern languages, 1954) and at the University of Rome (doctorate in geography [thesis in anthropology], 1968). She has traveled extensively and has done anthropological fieldwork in India. Her research interests are culture-specific and culture-free attitudes towards foods, purity and pollution, Hindi ritual and mythology, and Hindu culture as seen through modern Tamil literature. Her publications include "Women's Pollution Periods in Tamilnad (India)" (*Anthropos* 69:113-61); "Temporary Female Food Avoidances in Tamilnad: Interpretations and Parallels" (*East and West* 25:471-85); "The Logic of South Indian Food Offerings" (*Anthropos* 72:529-56); "Ritual as Language: The Case of South Indian Food Offerings" (*CA* 18:507-14); and "The Foods Disliked by the Gods in South India" (*Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 37:357-73).

The present paper was submitted in final form 11 x 78.

needs an explanation. Though different in form, ritual and legend may be statements about the same deity, and it is therefore not surprising if the symbol of that deity is the same in both cases. When, however, in ritual and legend a white-anthill may be either Śivaliṅgam or a goddess, or when in two otherwise identical versions of a temple legend the lotus may be either identical with the *liṅgam*² or opposed to it like the *yoni*, the largely context-free interchangeability of male and female symbols will become clear.

The interchangeable symbols of Hindu gods and goddesses to be discussed are derived from various ritual contexts and from temple legends. These legends pursue the purpose of explaining why a temple was built on a certain spot—usually because of the miraculous discovery of the idol—and/or of justifying the unorthodox shape of the idol. Complete analysis of this large body of temple legends is beyond the scope of this paper; here I shall cite only those cases which illustrate the “scenic opposite route” of symbolic thought, the paradoxical interchange of male and female symbols, against the background of the “highways” of symbolic association which confirm psychoanalytic views. It will be noted that, paradoxically, I shall mention more examples confirming Freudian theory than contradicting it, but there is good reason for doing so. The wider and more crowded the “highway,” the more striking the “scenic opposite route,” hence the usefulness of clearly tracing the former.

The material will be grouped in a scale of roughly increasing conceptual difficulty. While almost all the cases discussed contradict Freud’s categorical affirmations, the examples at the beginning of the exposition show “scenic opposite routes” on which traffic is still fairly dense in India and elsewhere. In the last few examples, the “scenic opposite route” becomes narrow and steep; perhaps only Hindus, and even among them the exceptional few, will venture the excursion.

Some interchanges of male and female symbolic meanings seem to be due to a totally arbitrary use of binary opposites. Others apparently correspond to one of the following: (1) different characteristics of the same object are selected, evoking either a male or a female association; (2) the same characteristic may be seen from different perspectives; (3) the male/female opposition may vanish in a common denominator at a higher level of abstraction. What stands out in this contextual neutralization (as linguists would call it) is that not only may the male category (in this case the symbol normally evoking a male association) be extended to include a female meaning, but also the symbol normally evoking a female association may come to have a male meaning.

Since polysemy and condensation of meanings have been adduced as definitions of symbolism (Turner 1967:28, 51), it is no wonder that polar symbols, fusing binary opposites, exist. In Hindu symbolism, Ardhanārīśvara, the hermaphrodite, immediately comes to mind. The iconographic fusion of male and female aspects, of Śiva and Śakti, is of great interest as an expression of a deep human aspiration for wholeness apparent in myth and ritual all over the world. Baumann (1955) has dedicated a voluminous monograph to bisexually conceived deities, souls, etc., and I do not intend to add to the literature on the subject. I would only note that in India the fusion of male and female aspects in one deity is not limited to iconography, but also appears in linguistic symbols. Śiva may be spoken of as Ammaiappar (“mother-father”), a sort of verbal Ardhanārīśvara with inverted signs. This fusion of male and female aspects under the female sign obviously belongs to *bhakti* (devotional) religion, in which the protecting, motherly qualities of the god are emphasized. A further semantic fusion

of god and goddess sometimes occurs in the names of Śiva and, more frequently, in those of Viṣṇu and his *avatāras*. Thus Śiva may be known as Minākṣisundarēśvara, where Minākṣi refers to Pārvatī, the goddess with fish-shaped eyes. Viṣṇu may be called Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa (Lakṣmī being his wife and Nārāyaṇa an alternative name for the god) and Narasiṃha, his man-lion *avatāra*, Lakṣmīnarasimha. Freud himself has created a bisexual symbol, speaking of the “phallic mother,” an alleged product of infantile fantasies (1964[1932–36]:126). In this “phallic mother,” in Ardhanārīśvara and its verbal equivalents, however, there is only fusion and no confusion of male and female elements (just as in real life the sexual chromosomes *Y* and *X* remain distinct in the male), whereas I am concerned precisely with such a confusion. Male and female symbols and associations are interchanged with total disregard of Freudian theory and even anatomical distinction.

THE TREE

Trees are widely venerated in India, both at the popular level of religion and in Sanskrit temples. As the trunk of a tree is usually long and solid, it would seem to be well suited to becoming a Freudian phallic symbol, and trees often do evoke a male association. On the other hand, the selection of a different characteristic or the choice of a different perspective may, albeit less frequently, convert a tree into a female symbol. (Trees, of course, also have several nonsexual associations. Their uprightness, for instance, may call to mind the vertical position of human beings in general as distinct from animals.) A common feature of popular Hinduism is the tree marriage, in which either trees are married to each other or a man or woman is fictitiously married to a particular tree. In these cases, within the category of trees equated with human beings a particular characteristic may be selected to warrant a male or a female association. The latex of a tree is readily likened to milk in India and elsewhere (Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1973b:262; Turner 1967:20), accounting for a female association of various species of “milk-trees.” Latex-exuding *Ficus* trees figure prominently in Indian ritual and mythology, but more than their latex, their constant renewal through aerial roots may stimulate symbolic thought suggesting such associations as strength, longevity, and fertility. A peepal tree that happens to grow near another, less vigorous species literally englobes it. This tendency of the peepal is artificially encouraged by planting a peepal tree next to a neem tree so that, when both are fully grown, the latter will be tightly clasped by the former. In the shade of this arboreal couple, suggestive of fertility, snake stones, which also hold a promise of fertility, are erected. What seems to be decisive for seeing a male in the peepal is probably its amorous embrace of the neem and, above all, its more vigorous growth. In Bengal, on the other hand, where banyan and peepal trees are brought into conjunction, the peepal is considered the female, probably again on the basis of the relative vitality of the trees (the growth of the banyan being even more exuberant than that of the peepal).

In the above examples, some kind of supernatural quality is attributed to trees, but they are not deities as such. In other cases, trees are more intimately connected with Hindu deities. Śiva in his *liṅgam* form is frequently associated and even identified with trees, as the psychoanalyst would have predicted. There are temples in which Śiva is worshipped not in the form of a *liṅgam* but in that of a tree (Census 1971:416; 1964a:114). In a popular version of the classic story of the pine forest, the peepal tree is patently phallic: In order to destroy the supernatural powers certain kings have acquired through their austerities and their wives’ chastity, Śiva decides to seduce the wives. He takes the form of a peepal tree, which the barren women are advised to embrace. The women immediately con-

² Following Hindu usage, the term *liṅgam* in this paper denotes either the combined *liṅgam-yoni* idol or the *liṅgam* only. In ritual the *liṅgam* worshipped is normally the combined idol, but in some *svayambhūliṅga* (self-born) temples and in mythology the term *liṅgam* may sometimes have its narrow meaning.

ceive and lose the supernatural powers which have enabled them to make water pots out of sand (Elmore 1913:81). Temple legends also frequently mention trees in connexion with idols of various deities, above all Śiva. The Śivaliṅgam may be discovered because blood oozes out of a tree, which later transforms itself into a *svayambhūliṅgam* (self-born). In these cases the tree is the alter ego of the *liṅgam*.

This assertion would seem to call for comment, as transformations in everyday experience as well as in mythology normally presuppose a progression from the initial to the end situation. In the majority of the discovery legends, no transformation occurs. In order to reveal its presence, which might otherwise have gone unnoticed (especially in the case of a *svayambhūliṅgam* indistinguishable from an ordinary stone), the hidden idol may bleed on being hurt. In other, less frequent cases, the god plays a trick on the discoverer and first appears as his double, in the shape of a tree, an anthill, etc. (Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1978). The fact that inanimate elements of nature bleed clearly indicates their supernatural quality; when they later take the form of an idol, this transformation results not in a progression but only in the substitution of one equivalent for another and hence a maintenance of the status quo.

In still other versions of the story, the *liṅgam* is found in the ground near or under a tree, which allows for a double perspective: the tree may be equated with the *liṅgam* (male) or with the earth (female). When the *liṅgam* is found under a banyan tree or near a peepal tree, the tree may or may not represent its double. When the *liṅgam* is found under a bamboo or a jasmine creeper, however, they are likely to be considered its opposites, since the hollow bamboo often has a female association and the creeper encircling the *liṅgam* may suggest Pārvatī embracing the *liṅgam*, a common mythological image. When the *liṅgam* is found in the hole of a tamarind tree (Census 1968b:322), there is hardly any doubt that the tree is opposed to the *liṅgam* as a female symbol, not only because it forms a receptacle, but also because tamarind juice may be equated with menstrual blood (Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1973a:171).³ In the latter examples, a female association of the trees may be induced, and they may indirectly represent Pārvatī, even though no goddess is specifically mentioned.

Other temple legends, however, establish exactly the same relationship between idol and tree with regard to goddesses as we have seen with regard to Śivaliṅgam. Lakṣmī in the shape of a stone may be found under a peepal tree, or Devī in the shape of a molehill may reside near a banyan tree, in which case it remains an open question whether goddess and tree are seen as equivalents or as opposites. When, however, blood oozes out of a tree (species not indicated) and the goddess Killamma appears in a dream to a devotee and announces her desire to be worshipped in the form of a bamboo stick (Census 1964a:160), the bleeding tree obviously is the goddess, in analogy to what has been said above. This latter example, in my opinion, not only contradicts Freudian psychoanalytic theory concerning the tree, but also constitutes a paradox from the structural point of view, since the opposition god/goddess would seem to require opposed symbolic expressions.

Trees as interchangeable male and female symbols may not seem particularly exciting. In their case, in fact, the "scenic opposite route" of symbolic thought is still fairly wide, inviting mental travellers from all over the world.

THE SNAKE

Human attitudes towards snakes are ambivalent in several respects. Snakes are hated and feared but also worshipped and

asked for protection. Snake worship is dictated not only by utilitarian apotropaic considerations, but also by various associations of ideas evoked by the reptile. Not all associations of the snake are sexual. The sloughing off of its skin may suggest its power to heal skin disease or even make it a symbol of death and rebirth; its undulating movement may recall waves and may connect it with rain and vegetal fertility; its chthonic habits may make it the guardian and bestower of treasures or link it to the realm of death. Its association with sex and human fertility, however, appears to loom largest all over the world. For Freud the snake is always a phallic symbol (1962[1900]:357), but anthropologists and archeologists know well that it may also be a female one. The ambivalent male/female associations of the snake are easily explained. If its shape, movement, and the fact that it lives in holes in the ground are considered, it tends to become a phallic symbol. The latter habit, however, may also be viewed from a different angle. The snake, living in the earth, may be seen not as opposed to the earth, but as its representative, and hence tends to become a female symbol. Worldwide, I believe, the phallic symbolism of the snake is more frequent than its female one, perhaps because its various male associations are reinforced by the image of the snake bite, suggestive of the perils of sex.

In India the cobra is the prototype of the snake category. Cobras and snakes in general are worshipped for apotropaic purposes, as protectors of home and hearth, as healers of skin disease, and above all for the benefit of human fertility. The most widely known snake deity is Nāgarājā, the king of snakes, but in Bengal people commonly venerate the snake goddess Manasā. Mythology tells not only of snake kings, but of snake princesses, known for their beauty, who usually marry human kings and give rise to semidivine dynasties. As in the rest of the world, in India the male aspect of the snake dominates. Apart from being a deity in its own right, the snake also appears as an adjunct or representative of gods and goddesses, in particular of Śiva. The legend of Neelakanteswara temple, Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh, for instance, mentions that a snake changed into a *liṅgam* (Census 1964d:148), and in iconography the *liṅgam* often has its snake double coiled around its base and spreading its hood over it. In Sri Thiagarajaswamy temple, Madras, the *liṅgam* is even serpent-shaped (Census 1965:64). The same primarily phallic symbolism can be inferred from the major Indian festival of the snake, Nāgapañcamī, which is typically a woman's festival, with fertility connotations and erotic overtones. Thus, clearly, the "highway" of symbolic thought considers the snake to be male, and only the "scenic opposite route" leads to a female image.

One way of arriving at a female association is through an arbitrary shift of perspective. The cobra coiled around the *liṅgam* is, then, not considered its double, but explicitly likened to Pārvatī drinking *soma* through the mouth of the *liṅgam* (O'Flaherty 1973:277). Despite its ambivalent character, however, the snake in India is never viewed as bisexual—in contrast, for instance, to its description in Azande mythology, in which the lower part of the "rainbow snake" is female and the upper male (Baumann 1955:248). The Indian snake is equated with a god or a goddess or is itself a god or a goddess for different worshippers in different parts of the country and even for the same speaker in different contexts. A Tamil film illustrates this interesting double perspective. In *Enkaḷ kulateyvam* (Our Family God), a cobra, in its character of a general deity residing in a white-anthill, is spoken of as Nāgarājā. The same snake also happens to be a household deity, and in this context it is called *tāy* ("mother"). Similarly, a prize-winning Tamil student, when asked to write about herself, starts by saying that she was born at Nagercoil, the capital of Kanyakumari district, where Nāgarmman ("mother snake") resides (*Ananda*

³ For a similar association of a red sap with menstruation, see Turner (1967:28).

Vikatan, January 17, 1971), even though she knows perfectly well that the famous temple of Nagercoil, which gives its name to the town, is dedicated to the king of snakes, Nāgarājā. Here opposite perspectives happily coexist; the cobra as the lord of all people is awesome and male, but as a family deity it is like a mother and hence female.

THE WHITE-ANTHILL

The white-anthill is practically synonymous with the snake in India, and like the snake it may be a male or a female symbol. Again a double perspective seems to be responsible for its contradictory symbolism. Considering its vaguely conical shape, the white-anthill may be likened to a Śivaliṅgam, sometimes with pronounced phallic connotation. Unequivocal testimony in this regard comes from an oral tale recorded by Sontheimer (1976:131): Some women go to worship a white-anthill on Nāgapañcamī day. One of them, on seeing a couple of cobras, warns the others not, as one might expect, of the dangerous poisonous snakes, but of the anthill, exclaiming, "The anthill is a man, keep away from him!"⁴

The male association of the white-anthill is thus guided by its outer contour, making it an equivalent of the *liṅgam*—as for instance in Sri Sivaloganathaswamy temple, where the *svayambhūliṅgam* is in the form of a white-anthill (Census 1971:21)—and the phallic snake. Conversely, the much rarer female association looks at the anthill from inside, so to speak. Its cavities, considered to be the favourite abode of snakes, are opposed to it and hence female. This second, more complicated way of analogical reasoning leading to a female meaning, however, seems to lie at the back of people's symbolic mind. The anthill is never explicitly likened to the *yonī* holding the snake-*liṅgam*, to my knowledge. Either it is entirely male and equated with its male content—the snake alias *liṅgam* or some male person—or it is entirely female and equated with its female content, a goddess. The legend of Sri Bhagavathiamman temple, Kanyakumari district, Tamilnad, illustrates the latter case: A boy hits an anthill and blood oozes out, whereupon an astrologer ordains that it be considered the image of the goddess Bhagavatī. It is now fenced, thatched, and worshipped as the goddess (Census 1968b:54). The "scenic opposite route" of symbolic thought which attributes to the anthill a female meaning, equating it with an anthropomorphic goddess, may even reflect on its theriomorphic divine inhabitant or vice versa. In Madras, for instance, a huge anthill symbolizes Nāgamman ("mother snake") (Gopalakrishnan 1953:98).

THE LOTUS

Unlike trees, snakes, and anthills, for which the "highways" of symbolic thought lead to a male image, the lotus flower is predominantly female and only exceptionally male. The supreme beauty of the flower doubtless accounts for its outstanding role in Hindu and Buddhist iconography and mythology. The associations evoked by the lotus go far beyond the mere male/female dichotomy. Its petals, which close in the evening and open again in the morning, make it an appropriate religious symbol of death and rebirth. Also, the beauty of any divine or human being may be described by speaking of his or her lotus-eyes, lotus-mouth, or lotus-hands, and reverence may be expressed by touching a deity's or a person's lotus-feet. When

a sexual distinction is relevant, however, the lotus most commonly appears in a female context.

The fact that it grows in water makes it representative of water, itself a predominantly female symbol. The Hindu deity most consistently symbolized by the lotus is Lakṣmī, the goddess of happiness and wealth. Not only does she stand on a lotus pedestal, but one and even two of her hands may hold lotus flowers. In one legend she even substitutes one of her breasts for a lotus bud needed in worshipping Śiva (Gupta 1971:21). Śiva temple legends tell of the discovery of the *liṅgam* hidden under a lotus growing in a tank. Here obviously the lotus is opposed to the *liṅgam* and equated with water and the *yonī*. Otherwise identical legends, however, invert the symbolic meaning of the lotus. Then the discovery occurs because a bleeding lotus becomes the *liṅgam* (Census 1965:10–11) or because the *liṅgam* in the form of an arrow is discovered in a bleeding lotus (Census 1966:329). In the former case the lotus *is* the *liṅgam*, while in the latter it may or may not be its redundant double. The legend of the Buddhist Svayambhunath temple near Katmandu echoes this Śiva story (in this Nepalese temple, numerous ritual and mythological connexions occur between Buddha and Śiva, starting from the name Svayambhū, now normally referring to Śiva) and uses the lotus symbol with the same unorthodox male meaning. The primordial Buddha is said to have appeared in the form of a flame (another typical alter ego of Śiva) in a lotus. The sacred spring or the hole in which the root of the lotus flower lies is worshipped as the goddess Guheśvarī. Just as in the above Śaiva example the lotus is assimilated to its contents, the *liṅgam*, so here it is to the flame. Nepali (1965:331), who mentions the legend, in fact also equates it with a *liṅgam*.

The triad *liṅgam*-lotus-water is exactly parallel to the one found in the legends telling of a *liṅgam* discovered in the ground near a tree. If we take the *liṅgam* and the earth or the *liṅgam* and water as binary opposites, the plant is the third element, which may or may not be present. Superficially it looks like a mediator, but in fact it does not mediate, perhaps because there is no contradiction to be resolved in such simple stories, not dealing with ultimate concerns. The third element rather is a redundant addition, which mostly duplicates its normal psychological equivalent (the tree the *liṅgam* and the lotus water or the *yonī*). In rare cases, however, the dominant association is disregarded. It might, of course, be argued that at a higher taxonomic level the lotus is a symbol of divinity par excellence and may thus stand for any god or goddess, as indeed it does. In the context of the temple legends, however, the lotus-*liṅgam* seems to be primarily the result of a completely arbitrary reduction of a triad to a dyad.

THE POINTED WEAPON

According to Freud, the imagination does not admit of weapons' being conceived as female symbols. Fischer (1963:245), interpreting Fromm, asserts that metal weapons, because of their character and use, once introduced would automatically receive an aggressive, phallic symbolic meaning. Again I do not deny that this is mostly true, but I want to refute the view which confuses a statistically greater frequency with an absolute psychological law.

Weapons are prominent in Hindu iconography and figure in the multiple hands of many deities. Not every such weapon characterizes the holder. Some weapons and other objects are held by more than one deity, and only the combination of all emblems allows an unambiguous identification of its owner. Some weapons and other objects, however, have become the symbols of deities; for instance, the lance stands for the god Murugaṇ, for whom Vēl ("lance") is an alternative name. Apart from any phallic connotation, in the division of labour between

⁴ I wonder what Indian symbolic thought might have been if there were African termites, which build much higher and strikingly *liṅgam*-like hills, in India, since the irregularly shaped and often rather squat construction of the Indian termites is sufficient to evoke the image of a *liṅgam*.

the sexes the destruction of life through the use of weapons is normally the domain of man. The traditional incompatibility between weapon and woman, however, applies only to the human sphere. Goddesses in India and other parts of the world may be just as warlike as their male counterparts. This is perhaps one of the reasons that not only gods are depicted holding weapons in their hands and that weapons may become symbols of goddesses, but it is not the whole explanation. If it were, a weapon could only become the symbol of warlike, life-destroying goddesses, which of course many Hindu goddesses are. There is no indication, however, that this is the main criterion in choosing the symbol, nor is the weapon symbol abandoned when, as now increasingly happens, the goddess becomes benign.

The trident is a symbol that recurs in different periods and in different parts of the world, as d'Alviella has pointed out (1956[1894]:237-60). Whatever its psychoanalytic meaning may be—Freud (1962[1900]:358) says that “the number three has been confirmed from many sides as a symbol of the male genitals”—it is normally found in the hands of male supernaturals like the Assyrian god of air and storm, Poseidon, Śiva, and the devil. Many demons are stabbed to death by Śiva with his *triśūla*, and this weapon is so strongly associated with the god that he may be shown holding a *triśūla* even when endowed with only two hands. A *triśūla* carried by a mendicant immediately identifies him as a devotee of Śiva (apart from sectarian marks and other characteristic attire). In Tamilnad, a village shrine containing a *triśūla* in the place of an idol is often dedicated to the godling Muniśvara or (and this may surprise Freudian psychoanalysts) to one of various village goddesses. If the *triśūla* appears in the hands of Durgā, the explanation may be that, since she is Śiva's violent Śakti, fighting demons and ultimately one with him, she may rightfully carry his weapon. The *triśūla*, however, also represents village goddesses independent of Śiva and Muniśvara. Here we have no selection of different features or reversal of perspectives; what makes the *triśūla* a symbol of gods and goddesses alike is a complete abstraction from any sexual association. The *triśūla* has become a symbol of power and hence may be an attribute of both gods and goddesses.

The sword also need not symbolize male deities exclusively. It figures in the hands of numerous gods and goddesses with no specific identifying function, but when it is used as the true symbol of a deity it normally refers to a god. Śiva's amorous visit to a village goddess, for instance, may be symbolized by a sword laid across the neck of a pot (Beck 1969:564). Also, the legend of Kotravaleeswara temple, Ramanathapuram district, Tamilnad, equates sword and *lingam* (Census 1969:201): A Pandyan king on a hunting expedition fell asleep in the forest. When he awoke, he saw a hermit fighting with a tiger. Wanting to come to his aid, he reached for his sword but could not find it. After having risked his life in trying to save the *ṛṣi* (sage) with his bare hands, *ṛṣi* and tiger suddenly disappeared. Searching for his sword, he found it by the side of a beautiful *lingam*, for which he at once had a temple built.

Here we have again the same redundancy as in the case of the tree-*lingam* and the lotus-*lingam*, i.e., the sword duplicates the *lingam*. So far there is nothing surprising from the psychoanalytic point of view. A legend from Maharashtra, however, inverts the symbolic meaning of the sword. In it the goddess Bhavāni appears in dream to Sivaji, a Maharashtrian hero victorious in battle against the Muslims, and informs him that she has embodied herself in his sword so that he may defeat his enemies (Sontheimer 1976:46). Obviously the sword here is equated with the goddess not because it evokes any female association, but because, similar to the *triśūla*, it has become an abstract symbol of fighting power that may be vested in gods and goddesses alike.

The arrow is still another pointed weapon which Freudian

psychoanalysts would conceive of only as a male symbol. Again, this is mostly the case, and in the Tamil temple legend mentioned earlier the *lingam* appears in the shape of an arrow. Also, in a Keralese temple legend a metal arrow in the trunk of a kanjira tree indicates the presence of Śiva (*Kerala District Gazetteers* 1972:735), in which case probably both the tree and the arrow are symbolic doubles of the *lingam*. The *Śiva Purāṇa*, however, freely inverts this common psychological association of the arrow: “Brahmā said: . . . Pārvatī in the form of the vaginal passage and an auspicious arrow shall form as the pedestal wherein the phallus shall be installed” (Kunst and Shastri 1970:1299 para. 37). In this paragraph the arrow-pedestal is clearly associated with the *yoni* and not with the *lingam*, as one might expect. No particular logical or analogical reasoning seems to be responsible for this inversion, but the triad *lingam*-arrow-*yoni* is arbitrarily reduced to the dyad *lingam*-*yoni*.

THE VESSEL

Vessels, like the other objects and elements of nature mentioned so far, may also stand for themselves and need not acquire any symbolic meaning. Besides, the most common symbolic use of the vessel is certainly nonsexual and lies in the culinary field. When a sex-specific association does arise, however, the “high-way” of symbolic thought leads towards a female image, which Freud would have to be absolute. The female connotation of hollow objects may even appear in language. The Baining of New Ireland, for instance, apparently think in such psychoanalytic categories. They readily spoke of the tape recorder in female terms on the grounds that it was a hollow receptacle (Mainard Scheller, personal communication, 1974).

In Hindu iconography and mythology, references to receptacles are legion. Best known among them is the *yoni*, the female principle, forming the base and receptacle of the *lingam*, the male principle. As to pots, we have already met two instances demonstrating their dominant female association: the village goddess in the guise of a pot who is visited by Śiva in the guise of a sword and the chaste wives whose miraculous water pots break when they conceive by Śiva, the peepal tree. To mention but a few further examples of pots with female associations, the goddess Lakṣmī, in addition to lotus flowers, has pot emblems, and the sage Agastya is known as “the pot-born,” the pot patently representing the womb.

A favourite ritual object in many parts of India is the *kalaśa*, a metal vessel filled with water and topped by a coconut surrounded by green mango leaves. It most frequently represents a goddess; Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning, for instance, may be worshipped in this form. Commonly used in domestic rites, the *kalaśa* may also stand for the deceased ancestors. Since ancestors include persons of both sexes, the *kalaśa* on these occasions is divested of its specific female association. By extension it may thus become a symbol of any deity, a vessel of divine essence as it were, and therefore may also sometimes stand for a god. Gaṇapati, for instance, may be worshipped in the form of a pot, in addition to an image or some other aniconic representation of the elephant god. Also Venkateśvara may be symbolized by a *kalaśa* bearing the Vaiṣṇava *nāma* (sign) (Thurston 1909, vol. 1:241; vol. 3:461), despite the fact that hardly any devotee will lack a printed image of this popular form of Viṣṇu. Even Śiva's five heads are sometimes symbolized by pots (Beck 1976:221).

As we have seen, the symbolic uses of weapons and vessels are similar in the sense that at a higher level of abstraction their sex-bound associations vanish and they become interchangeable symbols of gods and goddesses. The vessel, however, is the

more remarkable because the meaning of an originally female symbol is extended to include the male one.

So far we have been talking of man-made objects and elements of nature which have no intrinsic connexion with either sex and may become male or female symbols only by metaphor. The "highway" of symbolic thought clearly exists, but the "scenic opposite route" contradicting psychoanalytic theory is not devoid of traffic. Now I should like to point out some further cases in which the "scenic route" becomes narrow and steep and traffic consequently much thinner. The connexion, which in rare instances is severed, either is one of metonymy rather than metaphor or else disregards the parallel between the sex of an animal and the sex of a deity.

THE LINGAM

The *lingam* is the most common symbol of Śiva and a symbol at that for which, at first sight, one would least expect a female association. Illiterate villagers may at times be ignorant of its phallic meaning, but the scriptures are quite explicit about it. In myth and legend, its phallic connotation is patent or at least transparent, and the *lingam* idol—apart from the fact that it rises from the *yoni*, contrary to the physiological situation—may be sculptured in precise anatomical detail. I do not want to imply that the *lingam* is *only* a phallic symbol. A Hindu worshipping the *lingam* thinks as little of sexual intercourse as a Christian thinks of cannibalism when taking Holy Communion. In worship the *lingam* is simply the aniconic form of Śiva and acts as a sign of the divine presence, as the primary meaning "sign, mark" of the Sanskrit term implies.⁵

The *lingam*, however, is not just one of a Hindu deity's numerous symbols, but the most prestigious symbol of one of the most prestigious Hindu gods, and in this quality an extension of its meaning becomes plausible. A bridge may be built between Śiva's aniconic and iconic idols by providing the *lingam* with faces, most commonly five male faces (*pañcamukha-lingam*). The idol of Pasupatinath temple, Katmandu, goes a step farther and represents the left half of one of its four faces as female, as can be concluded from a more elaborate coiffure and an extended ear bearing a floral stud. In another Nepalese *mukhalingam*, the right side of one of the faces is female (Pal 1974:85). This splitting of the faces on the *lingam* is, of course, only a variation of the Ardhanārīśvara figure mentioned before. The fusion of the male and female principles symbolized in the latter in anthropomorphic form and in the combination of *lingam* and *yoni* in aniconic form is duplicated in the *lingam* itself. An even more intimate redundant fusion of male and female in the *lingam-yoni* idol appears in a legend of Sri Ardhanareeswara temple, Trichy district, Tamilnad. It is said that, when bathed with honey, the *svayambhūlingam* reveals on its left side the image of Umā (Pārvatī) (Census 1966:350). The left side of the rock-*lingam* in the Himalayan temple of Kedarnath is also said to contain Pārvatī (Bharanidharan 1975:258).

So far, in spite of an extension of its symbolic meaning, the *lingam* has remained solidly associated with Śiva, and the inclusion of the female aspect within the male simply corresponds to the complex image of Śiva himself, without any interchange of symbols. The *lingam*, however, may also lose its exclusive connexion with Śiva and become a symbol of other

deities, thus opening the way to a reversal of its original sex-specific connotation. When the king of snakes Nāgarājā at Nagercoil is worshipped as a *lingam*, there is still hardly any shift of meaning, as snake and *lingam* may be synonymous. Again, that Tāṇumālayan at Suchindrum, Kanyakumari district, has a *lingam* shape is not very surprising, since the temple is basically a Śiva temple despite its myth, which speaks of the fusion of Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Brahmā through the power of Anusūyā's chastity.

A definite extension of meaning of the *lingam* symbol appears at Thiruvottiyur, near Madras, where in addition to Śiva himself the 27 lunar asterisms are represented as *lingas*. Such a broadening of meaning equally applies to semantics. Personal names ending in *lingam* are numerous. While they mostly refer to Śivaliṅgam with a qualifying epithet—for example, Mahāliṅgam ("the great") or Cokkaliṅgam ("the beautiful")—names like Nāgaliṅgam and Rāmaliṅgam also occur. The latter is particularly noteworthy in that it extends the *lingam* symbol to the Vaiṣṇava camp.

While the above extensions of meaning, curious as they may be, do not contradict the basic phallic association of the *lingam*, in a cave temple of Kashmir Hindu symbolic thought completely reverses Freudian dogma. Three unsculptured rock formations considered to be *svayambhūlingas* are worshipped as the goddesses Mahākālī, Mahālakṣmī, and Mahāsarasvatī (*Ananda Vikatan*, February 14, 1972). Such female *lingas* are not even particularly rare; Māriyamman, at Pudupatti, Salem district, Tamilnad, is also represented by a stone *lingam* (Census 1968a:575), and so is Poleramma, at Krishnapatnam, Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh (Census 1964d:23). In all these cases, the extension of the *lingam* symbol to female deities is facilitated by the fact that its original owner Śiva is not present as the opposite pole. A further peculiar use of the *lingam* symbol contradicts not only psychoanalytic, but also structural dogma. It is limited to Maharashtra (and perhaps occasionally Madhya Pradesh?), where Śiva and Pārvatī, Khaṇḍobā and Mhālāsā (identified with Śiva's son Skanda and wife), and other local Śaiva couples are regularly represented as two *lingas*.

Just as the fusion of male and female aspects in one figure does not cause any difficulty of interpretation, so the extension of an originally male symbol to other deities without distinction of sex is not particularly difficult to conceive. When male and female beings are represented side by side, however, structural common sense would expect some kind of distinction, however arbitrary. The Gowaris, a pastoral caste of Maharashtra, for instance, represent male and female family members who have died without offspring both by bamboo sticks, but distinguish the male by one cross-piece at the top and the female by two (Russel and Hira Lal 1969:163). Contrary to this simple structural reasoning, in Śaiva temples of Maharashtra god and goddess are symbolized by two identical *lingas*, and, what is more, in some cases they may be represented by two identical combinations of *lingam* and *yoni*. While some Hindus not versed in the subtleties of their religious iconography may be ignorant of the respective symbolic meanings of *lingam* and *yoni*, such ignorance is to be excluded in the people who created and erected the idols and who were well aware of the fact that one combined *lingam-yoni* idol would have been sufficient to symbolize the divine couple. The only way of explaining this peculiar regional use of a pan-Indian symbol, in my mind, is to postulate a total abstraction from its original sex-bound meaning combined with a particular taste for redundancy. Even in the perfectly symmetrical juxtaposition of two *lingam* symbols there remains, of course, the possibility of a positional distinction between Śiva and Pārvatī, the *lingam-yoni* to the right being thought of as Śiva and the one to the left as Pārvatī. This, however, seems to satisfy very little the requirements for symbolizing binary opposites, especially because the male/female = right/left association is not absolute in Hindu iconography. Incidentally, there is even a scriptural basis for the

⁵ Though I am not competent to voice an objection against the Sanskrit origin of the word *lingam* on linguistic grounds, I find it very strange that such an important and obviously pre-Aryan symbol should only be known by its Sanskrit name, the more so as for the Sanskrit term *yoni* a Dravidian equivalent exists. In Tamilnad *lingam* and *yoni* are normally spoken of as *lingam* and *avūṭaiyār*. What could have induced *lingam-yoni* worshippers to borrow from Sanskrit only the most important part of the binomial and forget their own term completely?

interchangeable male and female symbolism of the *lingam*. The *Vāmana Purāṇa* states that, wherever the *lingam* of Śiva is, Umā resides beside it in the form of a *lingam* (Pal 1974:86). Apparently, however, the very paradox of this use of the *lingam* prevented it from becoming generalized; or could it be that the *śloka*s of the *Vāmana Purāṇa* already reflect a particular regional tradition?

Though the female *lingam* is striking, it does not represent the peak of the roughly rising "scenic opposite route" of symbolic thought traced in this paper for two reasons: firstly, in spite of the agreement of the sacred books (with the exception of the *Vāmana Purāṇa*) on its meaning, the *lingam* is a stylized emblem and as such liable to further abstraction, and secondly, it is not particularly rare.

THE COW

Unlike the snake, which derives its alternative male and female associations from behavioural characteristics viewed from different angles and not from a distinction between male and female snakes (which would be difficult for a layman to make), the cow is visibly and semantically distinguished as a female animal. The "highway" of symbolic thought naturally leads to a female image, and the "scenic opposite route," a male association of the cow, seems even more paradoxical than a female *lingam*. The dominant symbolic association of the cow revolves around its motherly, nurturing qualities. Naturally, the cow need not always symbolize human or divine female beings. Cow and calf were chosen as a symbol of the Congress Party, but this more abstract use astutely plays upon the same theme. The very holiness of the cow stresses the mother image. She is described as the mother of India, the mother of man, or the mother of the gods.

The holistic tendency we have seen in the Ardhanārīśvara figure and in the combined *lingam-yoni* idol may also apply to the cattle image. Thus the *Atharvaveda* mentions the cosmic steer, which is male and yet pregnant and which gives semen as well as milk (Baumann 1955:142). This extraordinary image nevertheless corresponds to the linguistic universal that normally the male category may be extended to include the female. When Aditi, the heavenly cow, in the same text is described as mother and father simultaneously, it is more interesting, because it contradicts the above near universal. Both mythological beasts of the *Atharvaveda*, in their fusion of opposites, however, are distinct from the interchangeable male and female symbols that are the subject of this paper.

Normally in mythology, whenever a deity is symbolized by an animal whose sexual distinction is relevant, it is the male animal that stands for the god and the female animal that stands for the goddess. A typical example is provided by the bull Nandi, which not only is Śiva's steed and doorkeeper, but often represents the god himself. Iconography leaves no doubt about the bull's sexual potency, and mythology elaborates on the same theme. In a delightful story contained in *Tiruvīḷai-yāṭal* (1972:188-90), the Jains desire to destroy Madurai and its king, an upholder of Śaivism. They send forth an all-destructive magical cow, hoping thus to put the king into a terrible predicament: either be killed with his subjects or commit the crime of cow slaughter, since an evil cow is still a cow. Śiva, however, comes to the aid of his royal devotee and sends his bull Nandi. The evil cow is immediately charmed by the bull's masculine beauty, forgets her murderous intent, and engages in lovemaking.

Some temple legends, however, ignore this normal correspondence between sex of bovine and sex of deity. The legend of Lakṣmīnārasimhaswamy temple, Warangal district, Andhra Pradesh, (Census 1964e:29) relates that Lakṣmī, the goddess of the Chenchu forest tribe, appeared in the dream of a mendi-

cant devotee of Lord Lakṣmīnārasimha and informed him that Lakṣmīnārasimha (her husband) was buried on a hill. When the Chenchus reached the hill to get the image, they saw a cow suddenly change into a *śālagrāma* (fossil ammonite). They took the image and the *śālagrāma* and installed them downhill in a temple. Strictly speaking, as far as the purpose of the story is concerned, the presence of the cow is superfluous here. In the prototype of such discovery legends, the cow acts as the indicator of the hidden idol by pouring out her milk over it. Here this is not necessary, because the dream has already indicated the location of the idol—contrary to the usual sequence of events, in which a dream may help to reveal what the human actors have not understood in spite of the miraculous signs. The cow therefore makes her appearance simply because of her religious prestige and, what is more, with total disregard for her normal female association. The cow, in fact, does not change into an image of the goddess, which would have been a more plausible turn of events, but into a redundant symbol of Viṣṇu, since the *śālagrāma* is considered to be an aniconic form of that god. I do not think that any particular meaning can be attached to this inverted symbolic use of the cow. The madder the madness, the more the hidden meaning (Freilich 1975) need not always be true. In my mind, the cow's transforming herself into Viṣṇu-*śālagrāma* simply shows that while any association is theoretically possible and an association respecting the sexual dichotomy is most likely, inversions can never be excluded. Extremes meet, as popular wisdom knew long before the invention of structuralism.

Another legend attributing to the cow a male association comes from a Śiva temple in Srikakulam district, Andhra Pradesh (Census 1964a:159). The idol, called Sri Potteswara-swamy, is a *lingam* situated several feet below ground level. According to the legend, the Pāṇḍava prince Arjuna, roaming in a forest during his exile, shot an arrow at a *kapila* (reddish brown cow). Where the belly of the cow fell, it changed into a Śivaliṅgam, for which a temple was built. The white stripes of the cow's belly are still to be seen on the side of the *lingam*. In this case the inversion of the symbolic meaning of the cow, the epitome of all female animals for the Hindu, is more radical than in the above legend. Firstly, the cow is equated with Śiva and not with Viṣṇu, whose masculinity is less in evidence than that of Śiva and who, if need be, may even transform himself into a beautiful woman and bear Śiva's child. Secondly, the cow changes into the phallic *lingam* and not into the sexually more neutral *śālagrāma* symbol. Thirdly, it is the belly of the cow, strongly associated with her female, birth-giving quality, that becomes the *lingam* and not, as might conceivably have happened, her horns, which may have a male association.

A third legend which paradoxically equates the cow with a male deity is one of the versions explaining the name of Gokarna ("cow's ear"), the site of a famous Śiva temple on the Kanarese coast of the Indian peninsula. This time it is not a cow that becomes the *lingam*, but the *lingam* that changes into a cow (Thomas 1945:53): Śiva had granted to the demon Rāvaṇa the boon of taking his *lingam* to Lanka. Realizing that he had promised too much, he decreed that the *lingam* become rooted the moment it touched the ground. When the *lingam* was dropped by cowherd-Gaṇeśa, who had promised to hold it, Rāvaṇa tried to prevent it from sinking, but the *lingam* changed into a cow and continued to sink, leaving only its ears above ground.

These three male associations of the cow contradict not only common sense, but also the usual supremacy of the male category. Cultural reasons exist, I think, for this stress on the female category in the case of the bovine. In spite of the bull Nandi alias Śiva, it is the cow which is the most sacred and most important animal in Hinduism. The prohibition of cow

slaughter, for instance, makes the female animal the prototype of the category, subsuming under it male cattle, buffaloes, and other related species of both sexes.

THE FEMALE BREAST

The female breast would seem to be a natural symbol of woman, not in a metaphorical but in a much closer metonymical sense, and yet it is possible to sever the intimate mental connexion between them. Here we have, in my opinion, the narrowest and steepest "scenic opposite route" of symbolic thought, along which perhaps only Hindus are willing to travel.

The traditions of two Śiva temples in Andhra Pradesh, both inspired by the somewhat unusual shape of an idol, have recourse to such an extraordinary reversal of associations. The first example is not derived from a legend that justifies the unorthodox shape of an idol; rather, it is this shape that serves to justify the magical powers attributed to the idol. In Viśveśwara temple, East Godawari district, the stone Nandi in front of the *liṅgam* is said to resemble the breast of a woman. It is believed that if the devotees desirous of having children worship the *liṅgam* and press this "breast" with their hands, a few drops of milklike liquid will trickle out, the number of drops indicating the number of children to be born (Census 1964b:183). The equation bull = woman's breast constitutes a bridge between this section and the preceding one, since simultaneously a sexually distinct bovine evokes an opposite sexual association and the normal mental connexion between female breast and woman is cut asunder. A representation of the bull Nandi, a symbol of virility, which resembles a breast and behaves like a breast is not only a particularly confused hermaphrodite, in which male and female parts do not exist side by side but are inextricably mixed, but also an animal-human hybrid. Such defiance of categories, which in other circumstances might account for extreme impurity, here is seen as a source of magical power because of the summing of male and female, animal and human qualities.

Contrary to the above example, the reversal of psychoanalytic and commonsense associations occurring in the legend of Achanteswara temple, West Godawari district, apparently pursues the immediate purpose of explaining the somewhat bulbous shape of the *liṅgam*. This legend is much more elaborate than the usual versions justifying imperfections in the idol. It runs as follows (Census 1964c:115-16): The sage Acyuta and wife Gaṅgā prayed to Śiva for salvation. Śiva asked them to offer daily flowers to him and Pārvatī and imposed on them strict celibacy. When they broke the latter proscription, he cursed them to be reborn as a Brahmin and a dancing girl. Later Śiva, in the form of the sage Vālmiki, asked the reborn Brahmin to worship his *ātma liṅgam*, a small replica of the *liṅgam* worn on the body in a casket, eight times a day, i.e. every three hours. Then Śiva assumed the form of a servant boy acting as a mediator between the Brahmin and the dancing girl-prostitute. One night, tired from sexual intercourse, the Brahmin could not wake up in time to fetch the *ātma liṅgam*, which he had removed from his body and left in the kitchen, nor had he time to find sandal paste and flowers necessary for the *pūjā*. Helplessly he turned to his beloved, who was asleep with her smooth white breast exposed. There also was some leftover sandal paste and a few betel leaves. He felt that Śiva, who is omnipresent, would certainly be present also in the breast, which resembled a Śivaliṅgam. When he began to worship the breast by smearing sandal paste on it and offering betel leaves in place of flowers, the girl awoke and was upset by his strange behaviour. Returning to his normal state from deep meditation, he explained to her that devotees had often realized the presence of Śiva in what they believed to be the god. An innocent shepherd realized the *liṅgam* in the dung of sheep, others in a toe or in an inverted corn measure. The dancing girl demanded to see

Śiva in her breast, and the Brahmin prayed for this to happen. Śiva appeared before them in the breast, blessed them both, and granted them salvation. The Śivaliṅgam converted into a stone has all the appearance of a breast. There is no pedestal, and as it emanates from the ground it is said that the remaining portion of the body of the woman is within the ground. The *liṅgam* is called *chantiliṅgam* ("of the breast").

It may be noted that this legend consists of two symmetrical and inverted parts, as the structural analysis of myths usually reveals: the ascetic god Śiva curses the amorous couple, while the erotic god Śiva blesses it. This inversion, however, only forms the framework of the story. The central theme is the unilateral inversion of the meaning of a single element, the female breast that is equated with the *liṅgam*. It is probably not accidental that the somewhat unusually shaped *liṅgam* was not more plausibly said to resemble a flower or some kind of fruit (which indirectly, however, might also evoke a female association) but, much more paradoxically, a breast. The very audacity of the image then gives rise to further, this time cultural absurdities: First, the dissolute Brahmin himself contradicts cultural values. A Brahmin is supposed to subjugate his passions, and, since this particular Brahmin's offence in his former life was erotic, one would expect him to make up for it by cultivating asceticism and even resisting the temptations to which Śiva might expose him. Second, a *pūjā* takes place after sexual intercourse without a purificatory bath. That the necessity of such a bath does not even occur to the Brahmin in the legend amounts to a total disregard of ritual-purity rules. Third, leftover sandal paste and betel leaves are used in *pūjā*. According to the Hindu pollution concept, they would be considered on a par with the leftovers on a plate soiled by saliva and would be totally unacceptable to any god under normal circumstances. Also, betel leaves, though they may be offered to gods at the end of a meal, would be out of place as a substitute for flowers.

As for the unusual objects enumerated by the Brahmin as having been worshipped in lieu of a *liṅgam*, dung as excrement is impure but cow dung may be shaped into a cone and worshipped, for instance, as Gaṇeśa. Though sheep dung does not have the virtues of cow dung, it is quite conceivable that shepherds might use sheep dung in ritual for lack of cow dung. Substituting a human toe, a rather impure part of the body, for a *liṅgam* would seem to be an insult, but not so in Liṅgāyat ritual. Though the legend is not of Liṅgāyat origin, as the fact that the hero is a Brahmin proves, it apparently has been conceived in Liṅgāyat surroundings, judging from the *liṅgam* pendant to be worshipped. It is common practice among Liṅgāyats to worship the feet of the *jaṅgam* (literally "walking *liṅgam*," the Liṅgāyat priest) and to drink the water in which he has dipped his feet or his toe. Besides, the symbolic substitution of a foot (or a toe) for a phallus would not be extraordinary according to Freudian theory. The inverted corn measure, without being impure, pertains to the economic field, which should normally be separate from religion, but the fact that it is said to have been inverted proves that there was an attempt at creating at least a vaguely *liṅgam*-shaped object. The choice of the dancing girl's breast in lieu of the *liṅgam* is a far greater ritual and psychological absurdity than the others. She is not only ritually inferior as a woman, but also a prostitute, i.e., a particularly impure category of woman. The Brahmin as a last resort might have chosen her head, the noblest part of her body,⁶ and thereby somewhat attenuated the ritual outrage, but he prefers her breast.

One might postulate that the opposition breast/phallus vanishes at a higher taxonomic level, since both are sexual organs. The reputed resemblance of breast and *liṅgam*, like the resemblance of bull and breast in the preceding example,

⁶ For the latent sexual meaning of the head in Punjab, see Hersman (1974:277-78).

probably did arise because of this mental common denominator. The point of the story, however, is not an elision of opposites. The series of absurdities culminating in the equation breast = *liṅgam* felicitously demonstrates the boundless grace of Śiva according to the *bhakti* tradition. In this religious view, if there is true devotion, the god will forgive the breach of all rules, be they ritual or commonsense. The reversal of the normal associations of breast and *liṅgam* is therefore used to express the negation of traditional ritual values in *bhakti* religion.

THE TERM "MOTHER"

To conclude this exposition of interchangeable symbols and paradoxical associations of Hindu gods and goddesses, I shall mention one more, at first sight, absurd use of a female symbol for a male, this time belonging not to legend but to language and referring not to Śiva but to Kṛṣṇa. The Tamil poet and patriot Subramanya Bharati wrote a poem apparently defying even the "factual universal" that all kinship systems distinguish male and female parent by separate terms" (Greenberg 1970:101). The poem is entitled "Krishna My Mother" (Anton 1977:101). Bharati, of course, is not concerned with sex roles, but wants to express his total dependence on Lord Kṛṣṇa, who protects him like a mother in the best tradition of *bhakti* religiosity.⁷

There is reason to believe that Hinduism predisposes to the interchange of male and female symbols we have been discussing. This may be so because ideas of monistic philosophy have filtered down to the level of popular consciousness; in the legend of the breast-*liṅgam* reference is in fact made to Śiva's being omnipresent. Hinduism, however, contains another highly original philosophico-religious concept that seems to me even more relevant, that of the gods' sports (*līlā* in Sanskrit and *tiruvīlai-yāṭal* in Tamil). Śiva and other high gods of Hinduism are not bound by causality and preoccupied with teleology, nor do they necessarily act to uphold moral values. All their benign and cruel activities, including creation and destruction, are pure play. This glorification of arbitrariness may leave its mark on Hindu symbolism.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this paper has been to demonstrate that symbolic associations are less psychologically determined than Freudian psychoanalysts are accustomed to think and that "scenic opposite routes" of symbolic thought exist, leaving a margin of arbitrariness. At the same time, I hope to have established that symbolic meanings are less arbitrary and also less context-bound than structuralists are accustomed to think. I wholly agree with Beck (1978:86) that "a symbol can evoke associations in its own right; it does not depend on a system of contrasts for its meaning."

It may be objected that my largely context-free symbolic meanings refer to idols of gods and goddesses, rather a special case comparable to proper names, whose meanings are not defined by context. This is true in a sense, but the comparison cannot be pushed too far. The meanings of proper names, like those of idols, do remain unchanged in the most varied contexts, but male and female names can never be substituted for each other. This is, however, precisely what happens in Hindu ritual and legend, where gods and goddesses may share the same symbols, apparently causing as little inconvenience to their devotees as the custom of giving the same Christian name to various family members (of the same sex only, however) causes traditional European families.

⁷ The same idea was expressed by Pope John Paul I on September 13, 1978, when he spoke of God as more like a mother than a father.

My list of interchangeable symbols and paradoxical associations of Hindu gods and goddesses does not claim to be complete, but while the examples confirming Freudian theory could have been multiplied *ad libitum* it would be more difficult to find new cases contradicting psychoanalytic assumptions. Of the ten headings, five are predominantly male symbols which occasionally may become female—the tree, the snake, the ant-hill, the pointed weapon, and the *liṅgam*—and five are predominantly female symbols which occasionally are given a male meaning—the lotus, the vessel, the cow, the breast, and the term "mother." This equal proportion is accidental; a further subdivision or a somewhat different one could have changed it. Nevertheless, it shows that iconographic and verbal symbols of Hindu deities follow neither the linguistic near universal according to which the male category is basic and may come to include the female nor the cultural universal of sexual asymmetry and male dominance (Rosaldo and Atkinson 1975:61, 72).

The fact that it is possible to avoid the "highways" of symbolic thought and choose "scenic opposite routes" shows that even collective thinking has a certain measure of freedom. Curiously enough, the more arbitrary "scenic routes," which totally disregard the dominant meaning of a symbol, are less surprising than the far less arbitrary "scenic route" leading to the opposite meaning. A row of *liṅgas* representing the lunar asterisms may produce only a shrug, but a *liṅgam* symbolizing Pārvatī or a cow's belly equated with a *liṅgam* is a challenge to the imagination.

This paper has been dedicated to predominantly male symbols' occasionally becoming female and vice versa, but such extraordinary reversals of the meanings of individual symbols (as distinguished from the structuralists' reversals of correlations) are not limited to the male/female dichotomy. Hindu iconography contains another such paradox. Ithyphallic figures in India and elsewhere normally evoke an association of eroticism and fertility. Such figures may be partially stripped of their sexual connotation by being made protectors of gardens, as in the case of Priapus in the ancient Near East or of certain scarecrows in present-day India. The reversal of their primary meaning is difficult to conceive, and yet Indian thought has accomplished it. By looking at ithyphallism from a different perspective, an ithyphallic yogi may be seen as a symbol of perfect asceticism (O'Flaherty 1973:267). Again, the whole of Śaktism in a way constitutes such a "scenic opposite route" of symbolic thought. While for the majority of Hindus the dominant divine principle is male, for Śakti worshippers it is female, and while normally all polluting acts and substances are excluded from Hindu ritual the *śāktas* of the "left hand" intentionally include them.

Though Hinduism perhaps predisposes to such paradoxical inversions, they also occur elsewhere. Hair symbolism is a case in point, and here Indians apparently choose only the "highway" of symbolic thought while the Western imagination travels either the "highway" or the "scenic opposite route." Leach (1958:154) has pointed out the astonishingly high proportion of cases from all over the world which fit the pattern long hair = unrestricted sexuality/short, partially shaved or tightly bound hair = restricted sexuality/close-shaved hair = celibacy, corresponding to the "highway" of symbolic thought in my terminology. In most of the social uses of hair symbolism mentioned by Hallpike (1969:254-64) and Hershman (1974:274-98), this dominant sexual connotation is transparent. Leach furthermore cites the case of Burmese and Assamese unmarried girls, who wear their hair short while married women wear it long in order to express different status categories and not sexual behaviour. Here we have what I would call a totally arbitrary "scenic route" of symbolic thought, unconnected with the main meaning. The reversal, the "scenic opposite route" to

which I wish to draw attention, is found in the associations evoked by the bald head. Christian monks, like their Buddhist counterparts, have shaven heads, in accordance with the dominant symbolic association; viewing the same feature from a different angle produces the European notion that balding is a sign of enhanced virility. This secondary idea may be derived from a desire for rightful compensation: that decreased handsomeness be compensated for by increased virility. On the other hand, a bald head also exaggerates the difference in hairstyle between man and woman normally symbolized by shorter hair versus longer hair and hence may be thought to denote accentuated masculinity. The actor who permanently displays a shaven head certainly does not want to stress his asceticism, but on the contrary wishes to create an image of strong masculinity.

According to Beck (1978:85), associations occur in a multi-dimensional space rather than being binary, but binary categories are also relevant, as this study proves. The interchangeability of male and female symbols and associations in Hinduism and the contradictory interpretations of ithyphallism and baldness teach us something about our use of such binary categories in creating symbols. When we are symbolizing one concept, its contrary normally remains latent and distinct, but we may also play with the opposites as if they were balls in the hands of a juggler. Our minds obviously do not enjoy the absolute freedom of Hindu gods indulging in their sports. Nevertheless, some measure of arbitrariness exists, as I hope to have shown. We may avoid the "highway" of symbolic thought, but behind it another highway opens, that of binary categories. Even though we succumb to the lure of the latter, or because we do so, however, we still have the possibility of thinking the unlikely.

Comments

by ARJUN APPADURAI

c/o Department of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa. 19104, U.S.A. 1 VI 79

Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's essay certainly demonstrates that a compromise is feasible and necessary between the radically context-free approach of Freudian theory and the radically context-dependent approach of structuralism to the problem of symbolic meaning. She has also used an admirable range of ethnographic and archival materials to demonstrate the plasticity of Hindu thought in regard to issues of divinity and gender. Her findings are persuasive, but her analysis could be pushed farther and theoretically refined.

The essay suffers from a lack of conceptual and terminological distinctions. It would have profited from a scheme (following Peirce 1932) that discriminates indexical, iconic, and symbolic signs. By extension, the author could have attempted a more careful analysis of the different ways in which these symbols are linked to their meanings—relations of reference, connotation, and other kinds of association. This would have clarified relations which, as the essay stands, are interchangeably described by such usages as "means," "represents," "is associated with," and so forth.

Such terminological distinctions are especially germane to Hindu religious thought, where the relationship between signs and their referents is largely indexical (i.e., based on a "natural" association between sign and referent) and where representations of divinities stand in a metonymic rather than a metaphoric relationship to their subjects. (The *liṅgam* does not simply represent Śiva, but, in an important sense, *is* Śiva.) If these features of indexicality and metonymy do characterize the relationship between Hindu religious signs and their referents, we still have to account for the important occasions of semantic inversion that Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi so carefully documents.

Her own hypothesis is that these occasions of inversion can largely be explained by a filtered-down Hindu monism and a more specific propensity of Hindu divinities to "play" with their visible forms and properties. These useful suggestions can be pushed farther, if my arguments concerning indexicality and metonymy are correct. Hindu thought may well be less concerned with the interchangeability of certain meanings than with the *transformability* of certain states, here those institutionalized in divine gender. Following Foucault's (1970) analysis of premodern European thought, it might be argued that for Hindus as well the universe is a complex set of signs from which to divine "the order of things." In Hindu thought, however, this natural order is itself fluid and inherently subject to transformation, inversion, and flux. Perceptual inversion is thus not merely permissible, but mandatory in some circumstances. The female *liṅgam*, the bull-as-breast, the breast-as-*liṅgam* are all examples of a special type of compromise between the Hindu view of what is ontologically possible and what is epistemologically feasible. If Śiva can *be* a bull, and Śiva is subject to radical transformations, may we not justifiably see a female breast in the form of the bull and proceed to expect it to lactate?

Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's essay takes us a considerable distance toward appreciating the need for a theory of signification that takes account of such cultural systems as the Hindu one.

by AGEHANANDA BHARATI

Department of Anthropology, Syracuse University, Syracuse, N.Y. 13210, U.S.A. 22 v 79

Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's "simile" of "highways" vs. "scenic routes" is indeed helpful for what she tries to establish in this important contribution. Since the interchangeability of *liṅgam* and *yonī* as icons and objects of formal worship is warranted by the *Śthalapūrāṇas* and other established local lore, I think she might have undertaken this whole enterprise not only without the benefit of psychology, but also without that of Lévi-Strauss. It seems to me that her findings come through loud and clear and that the incorporation of school-anthropology penums weakens rather than strengthens her point. "Symbol" is not a term that translates any Indian term—at least not in the sense generated by Western "symbol" users, including Jung, Freud, and Turner. For many years, I made it a point to ask Hindu pandits what the *liṅgam* was and, less frequently, what the *yonī* was. Not a single one of them said it was an *x*, *x* being an Indian (Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindi) word for "symbol." The only scholar who said that the *liṅgam* was a *pratīka* (that is, a representation or stand-in) of Śiva was a professor of philosophy at an Indian university, where philosophy (both Western and Indian) is taught and thought in English. All the pandits said that the *liṅgam* was Śiva and (more rarely, because I asked them more rarely) that the *yonī* was the *devī*. The explanation directed at Westerners by an intermediary invariably inserts "symbol," i.e., the *liṅgam* is a *symbol* of Śiva, the *yonī* a *symbol* of the goddess. I don't think it is that easy. If the cultural agent, the specialist, insists that the *liṅgam* is Śiva, then "symbol" apologetic is not warranted unless we state expressly that this is an etic device, not part of the corpus analyzed.

In the legends and the temple lore Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi has researched, I would think, therefore, that all statements implying the *symbolic* identity of god and goddess, or of *liṅgam* and *yonī*, could be trimmed to read the *identity* of the god and the goddess, of *liṅgam* and *yonī*. In fact, her "highway"—"scenic route" simile checks out rather nicely for a desymbolized statement, which would also be more in line with the cultural agents' notions (I wouldn't go as far as to say that it was emic, since the juxtaposition of highways and scenic routes is no part of the Indian cultural landscape). She does not have to be apologetic about contradicting Freudian theories—more power to her for so doing! She is certainly right when she gives priority to linguistic exigencies in the arbitrary assignment of male or

female to divinities where the base of such assignment is Sanskrit or, for that matter, any Indian language, not excluding the Dravidian.

She lists an impressive array of serpentine symbolism but overlooks the frequent Sanskritic homology of a woman's braided hair with a black cobra, *nāgarājarūpa* 'of the shape of the king of snakes.' This is so well-worn an epithet of female pulchritude that it seems unlikely that it did not make its way into Tamil lore. Though the lotus is no doubt a more pervasive marker in general beauty parlance, the cobra outranks the lotus when a woman's capillary splendor is eulogized.

I am not sure that water is a "predominantly female symbol" as the author avers; in Vedic and northern traditions this is certainly not the case. *Āpah*, the Vedic cognate of *aqua* as a deity, and Varuṇa, the other deity connected with water, are male. Does she refer only to the Tamil situation?

There is some problem in considering "the *lingam* and the earth and the *lingam* and water as binary opposites" for the Tamil Hindu scene: the remaining three "element-*lingas*" (*bhūtalīṅga*)—the wind-*lingam* at Kalahasti, the fire-*lingam* at Tiruvannamalai, and the ether-*lingam* at Chidambaram—should then be similarly arranged, which leaves us with an unassigned spare; somehow, I feel very uncomfortable with the "redundant additions" which would have to be marshalled to accommodate the three other *lingas* in this powerful scenario.

Apropos of villagers' being "at times . . . ignorant of its [the *lingam*'s] phallic meaning": not only villagers. Indeed, a whole slew of perfectly literate northern urban "modern" Hindus, Ārya Samājis and others, take great pains to deny the phallic connotation; they say it is a *yūpa* 'sacrificial pole'—but then, Freud would ask, what is a sacrificial pole? Though urban puritans are certainly not ignorant of the phallic meaning which they deny, there is no doubt that less articulate people in most parts of India, especially women, are ignorant of it. Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's parallel between the Hindu's not thinking of sex when he thinks of the *lingam* and the Christian's not thinking of cannibalism when he thinks of the Host is novel and felicitous. True enough, *lingam*, Sanskrit for "sign," is to the practitioner *just that*—a sign of Śiva, *not* a symbol. The *lingam*'s aniconicity is *not* arbitrary, since in the last analysis Śiva is formless. It is true that the *-linga* affix occurs in frequent non-Śivite first names. Rāmalingan, however, is not Vaiṣṇava in this sense, since it refers to the (Śiva)-*linga* established by Rāma at Rāmeśvaram—by the same token, of course, Rāmeśvaram is a Śivite shrine, i.e., "the Lord of Rāma."

There is a distinct possibility that the ritualistic-iconographic assimilations of the goddess to the male deity derive, in a Whorffian sense, from the nominal morphology of Sanskrit (as indeed of all classical Indo-European languages): when masculine and feminine merge in a compound, its gender is invariably masculine; somewhat ludicrously this may even have carried over through Indo-European centuries into the happily obsolescent "Mr. and Mrs. John Williams."

by RONALD L. CAMPBELL

Center for the Holistic Sciences, 6 Big Tree Rd., Woodside, Calif. 94062, U.S.A. 1 VI 79

Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's article is an intriguing attempt to examine the complex and difficult subject of the interchange of Hindu male-female symbols. She is to be congratulated for the scholarly inquiry into a paradoxical symbol system that has traditionally been shrouded by the esoteric Hindu thought process. She has correctly discerned that Freudian interpretations and Jung's ideas, as well as structuralist concepts on symbolism, reflect one-sided views of a system of symbols that conceals more than it reveals. It seems to me, however, that she merely states the obvious by defining the problem and fails to offer definitive solutions to this scholarly enigma. Also, her descriptive data do not seem to help her in refuting Jung's and

Fromm's deterministic concepts. She does not support her opinion that "the only true mental universals are to be found in language and in the related field of kinship systems and terminology"; in fact, she does not even address herself to this subject. (In contrast, Aurobindo contends that these symbols' secrets are hidden within a secret code in the Rig Veda.) I am not at all sure that she supports the premise of "an element of caprice in the use of symbols."

On the positive side, I like some of Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's descriptive analysis of certain symbols. Symbols, it must be remembered, are concrete representations of abstract philosophical principles. I question whether one can arbitrarily take a variety of symbols from a variety of socio-philosophical-religious traditions and throw them into one short article, thus dramatically revealing their true significance. Hindu religion has ancient roots and a multiplicity of schools which, even within a specific tradition, give different meanings to the same symbol. Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi of course speaks of the popular meaning and the esoteric significance of the sages who formulated the symbolism. She recognizes that Hinduism is monistic and that some Hindu Vedānta schools, such as Shankara's (*kevalādvaitavāda*), are characterized by unqualified nondualism. In this knowledge lie the clues as to the reason for the interchangeable symbols and paradoxical associations of Hindu gods and goddesses—who, after all, are merely forces of nature that represent the Hindu ultimate ground of existence.

I am dissatisfied with Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's analysis of the snake symbol. In its esoteric meaning it represents kundalini energy within man. It is remarkable that, at a time when so many European, Russian, American, and Japanese scientists are creating machines to tap and measure this energy system, the author completely misses this symbolism in the Hindu system of thought. It is especially so in view of the Hindus' claim that by activating this sleeping energy source within man one can transcend the separation between the self and the ultimate ground of being, thus experientially and paradoxically fulfilling her goal of understanding the interchangeable male-female symbols of Hindu mythology.

by JULES DE LEEUWE

Suezkade 173, 's-Gravenhage, The Netherlands. 27 IV 79

Noch konkrete symbolen, noch hun "archetypen" of structuren die de strekking ervan zouden bepalen, zijn m.i. ooit aangeboren, anders dus dan zowel Freud als Jung of Lévi-Strauss beweren. Symbolen ontstaan bij elk individu opnieuw maar daarmee nog niet willekeurig. De mogelijkheid tot vervangende uitbeelding is in zoverre aangeboren als bouw van en ontwikkeling binnen het menselijk zenuwstelsel, onder invloed van de individuele ervaringen, steeds opnieuw resulteren in een psychisch proces beginnend met niet-onderscheiden, dat loopt via gebrekkig onderscheiden en verwisselen, in der richting van onderscheiden en samenvattend plaatsen (verg. Piaget, o.a. 1926 en 1937). Symbolen ontleen hun vorm, inhoud en strekking aan het maatschappelijk heden dat van meet af op het individu inwerkt, waarbij het verleden, voor zover het overkomt, *niet* wordt geërfd maar via traditie zijn neerslag vindt, ten dele doelgericht, ten dele gedurende korter of langer tijd onontkoombaar verankerd in taal, gebruiken, heersende of juist oppositionele denkbeelden e.d.m. (De Leeuwe, o.a. 1953).

Zeer kort moge ik ingaan op de vermoedelijk belangrijkste groep voorbeelden van Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi: de symbolen voor het mannelijke en voor het vrouwelijke. Bij nader onderzoek blijken ze slechts onder bepaalde omstandigheden en op bepaalde manieren onderling verwisselbaar. Hoewel ik onvoldoende weet over Indiase maatschappijen en hun verleden, komt het me voor, dat Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi historische en vooral materiële voorwaarden verwaarloost juist door haar

pogingen om "kontekst-vrije" symbolische betekenissen bijeen te brengen. Bij mijn stelselmatig onderzoek van etnografisch materiaal, door derden verzameld omtrent Centraalafrikaanse Pigmeëen, Noordarnhemlandse autochtonen en zekere gemeenschappen uit de Nieuwe-Hebiden, kwam (opnieuw) aan de dag, dat weliswaar in principe alles hetzij als vrouwelijk of als mannelijk of als beide of als sekseloos kan worden opgevat; maar wat in deze of in gene maatschappij in grote lijnen feitelijk in dit opzicht gebeurt, blijkt bepaald door maatschappelijke ontwikkelingswetten. De *willekeurige* onderlinge verwisselbaarheid is schijn, behalve aan de marge.

Globaal uitgedrukt komt het erop neer, dat de mate waarin en de wijze waarop mensen en dingen mannelijk en/of vrouwelijk worden gedacht, afhangt van de door een stand van de produktiekrachten uiteindelijk bepaalde plaats van de seksen in een menselijke maatschappij. Wat dit betreft kan een maatschappij min of meer egalitair of meer gynecokratisch of meer androkratisch zijn ingericht. Er behoeft trouwens niet altijd sprake te zijn van symboliek = "*vervangende* uitbeelding." De situatie pleegt nog gekompliceerd te worden door nawerking van machtsverhoudingen en daarbij behorende opvattingen uit het verleden: vernieuwingen kunnen aan oude vormen en inhouden worden *toegevoegd*. Het vrouwelijke of het mannelijke kan alomvattend worden geacht naar gelang van (de levend gebleven herinnering aan) de historische faze waarin een maatschappij verkeert. Dat mannen daarbij als een soort vrouwen kunnen worden gezien, het wezenlijke aan een fallus vrouwelijk kan worden geacht of juist omgekeerd vrouwen als een soort mannen worden beschouwd enz., blijkt schering en inslag (De Leeuwe 1978 en de daar vermelde publikaties, 1980).

[Contrary to the theories of both Freud and Jung and Lévi-Strauss, symbols or "archetypes" or structures are never innate, as far as I can see. All symbols are acquired individually, though not arbitrarily. The potentiality for representation-through-substitution is built into the human nervous system in the sense that psychic discernment can only develop from nondiscernment through faulty discernment, taking one thing for another, to correct discernment and integration (cf. Piaget 1926, 1937, among others). Symbols acquire their forms, contents, and purports through the influence of social reality on each individual from the beginning; the past is *not* (biologically) inherited, but acquired and learned—partly purposefully imparted, but for the rest transmitted through the language, habits, prevailing and opposing opinions, etc., in which it is rooted (De Leeuwe 1953, among others).

I want to comment very briefly on Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's presumably most important examples, the symbols for femininity and masculinity. It turns out on further investigation that these symbols are interchangeable only under certain conditions and in certain ways. Though I am insufficiently informed on Indian societies and their past, it seems to me that Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi neglects historical conditions (particularly material ones) in her attempt to present "context-free" symbolic meanings. Systematic research on ethnographic data collected by others on the Pygmies of Central Africa, the Aborigines of northern Arnhem Land, and a number of societies in the New Hebrides has taught me, once again, that while in principle all beings and things may be looked upon as female, male, both, or neither, the lines along which this is done in a particular society are determined by laws of societal development. Except for marginal variations, any *arbitrary* interchangeability of symbols is only apparent.

Broadly speaking, the extent to which, and the ways in which, all beings are looked upon as female and/or male depends on the social positions of the sexes, ultimately the result of the level of the productive forces. Thus some societies may be relatively egalitarian, others more or less gynecocratic, still others more or less androcratic. Apart from this, the ascribed

femininity or masculinity may have more than a (merely) symbolic meaning. The situation is often further complicated by the fact that former positions of power and conceptions arising from them are remembered and have after-effects; new forms and contents may simply be added to older ones. Thus the phase of development in which a society stands (including the memories handed down from the past) may imply that things are to be considered mainly female or mainly male. As a consequence, in some societies or groups men may be looked upon as a kind of women and a phallus may be considered fundamentally female, while in others women may be seen as a kind of men, etc. (De Leeuwe 1978 and the literature mentioned there, 1980).]

by I. C. JARVIE

Department of Philosophy, York University, Toronto, Ont., Canada M3J 1P3. 15 v 79

Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's examples certainly dispose of the idea of universal or natural symbolic associations. A comment about caprice in the choice of symbols: When something is taken to symbolize something else, the mechanism would seem to be one of recognizing or imputing an analogy or making an association. Yet what looks analogous to what, what we associate with what, is not an arbitrary or capricious matter. Analogy, association, and imputation all base themselves on resemblance, and what can be taken to resemble what is a matter of point of view, of theory. To be more precise, any two things can be claimed to resemble one another under the aspect of some theory or point of view. To accept that *x* symbolizes *y* is implicitly or explicitly to articulate a theory that connects the two.

Some of Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's examples are very rarefied, thus not only making her point—namely, how unexpected and counterintuitive symbolic associations can be (i.e., how much they run against the grain of strong theoretical expectations)—but also, perhaps against her intentions, showing that such ingenuity does not gain wide diffusion, perhaps because the theories required to allow the asserted symbolic connection to make sense incur resistance.

It could be asked both of Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's and of my view how they explain the acceptability and popularity of some symbols and not others. Since I believe anything can be a symbol of anything else only provided that a theory can be devised that connects them, and since we can always connect any two objects or events by a theory, acceptability will always be possible. Popularity is different. Why and how a theory gets widely diffused is a problem in cognitive sociology that can only be summarily dealt with here.

Two main possibilities present themselves: (1) a theory diffuses because of its coherence with other theories; (2) a theory diffuses because of its success. In a culture in which many of the explanatory theories people use in everyday life are animistic, the coherence of any new theory with what we might call the metatheoretic commitment to animism—rather than particular current animistic theories—will be a control on their popular diffusion. In an officially antianimistic culture such as industrial society, commitment to the animistic metatheoretic demand would inhibit the diffusion of a theory and hence of symbolic association. A more positive factor in diffusion might be the success of the connecting theory. A theory that successfully explains and predicts phenomena and facilitates the development of effective technology opens the way for symbolic associations. A problem remains regarding those very popular symbol systems that draw on theories that have no currency or are unsuccessful or even destructive. For example, much body symbolism fails to reflect the realities of chemical, biochemical, and electrical-mechanical theories of its working.

In an otherwise excellent and stimulating paper, I feel that the author has missed the central fact that the modern psychoanalytic view of symbols is not as far from her own position as she may believe. There is a general consensus among psychoanalysts that a symbol is a symbol only when it works as a symbol. In other words, the interpretation of symbols in a dream without an intimate knowledge of the dreamer may be intellectually stimulating, but it is not considered a valid exercise because symbols cannot be isolated from their context. In psychoanalysis, of course, this context is less cultural than developmental.

For example, the snake has traditionally been interpreted as a phallic symbol, since the phallic, oedipal level was for a long time a central concern of psychoanalysis. With the extension of interest to the earlier developmental levels, we see that the snake-phallus equation, though the most common, is not invariant. The snake can be a symbol of bisexuality (Bettelheim 1955:196), of maternal devouring and engulfment (Kakar 1978:150), or of oral aggression (Ehrenzweig 1949:112, 116)—all of these symbolic equations arising from the oral level and ultimately related to the infant's wish to be, and fear of being, "reabsorbed" by the mother. The relatively greater bisexuality of Hindu symbolism, I suggest, is related to the predominance in Hindu culture (Kakar 1978) of the earlier, oral edition of unconscious fantasy rather than the later, phallic edition on which psychoanalysis concentrated during the time it was making its first discoveries in symbolism.

by R. S. KHARE

Department of Anthropology, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va. 22903, U.S.A. 3 vi 79

This paper is a useful exercise as far as it goes. It aims to be a structural study of symbolic relations and a symbolic study of structural relations. Its strength and success lie in offering symbolically significant examples. Some of these are quite subtle and capable of extended cultural analysis. Deities designated as father and/or mother and "female breast"—*lingam* are cases in point: When gods are called "mother" or "father-mother" and goddesses "father" or "mother-father" (*maibaa* in North India), interesting questions of cultural justification (cosmology) are raised that go beyond contextual language use and meaning. Characterizing these situations as "inversions" and "paradoxes" is only a partial explanation. Divine paradoxes are often entries into cultural rethinking. The practical, the metaphorical, and the transcendental are called upon to telescope into each other for a better view of the distant, but without a distortion of the cultural reality. Telescoping is as integral to cultural transformations as are freer associations. "Female breast"—*lingam* is therefore a case aptly addressed (for more and different cases, see O'Flaherty 1976:338-44, 355-57).

However, the full significance of this exercise remains clouded. The "scenic opposite route," even when "narrow" and "steep," is an intriguing pointer, but what exactly it is or can be we are not told. "Scenic routes," like "highways," sometimes end in dead ends or encounter unsuspected gradients, curves, turnoffs, and even turn-overs. They are a better metaphor for transformations and processes than for binary oppositions. Unfortunately, transformational procedures are neglected here in favor of binary oppositions. However, the data, even though almost entirely regional and uneven in quality (i.e., some scriptural, some ethnographic, some folk, some popular), are amenable to this procedure. Actually, if carefully extended further, Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's discussion of the *lingam* can, I think, not only illustrate convincingly the culturally deep, *reversible* transformations, but also show us how to reduce the "structuralists'

torture of ethnography" and yet render symbolic *sui generis* not only *in posse* but *in esse*.

This consideration of the *lingam* brings me to a methodological point variously made elsewhere (Khare 1978a, b) on studying the semantic, cultural domains of symbolic constructs in Indian civilization. Since the latter involves long-standing literary and lexical traditions, the symbolic constructs most often participate in long-existing, codified, intricately structured, multiple domains of logical relations and meanings. Transformations proceed in terms of these domains, and if successfully deciphered they are helpful in showing how changes, shifts, inversions, and new recombinations may (often selectively) occur among them. However, the cultural ground rules for these changes are usually so complex that an analyst can neither simplify nor ignore nor "redo" the semantic domain beyond a certain point.

The *lingam* is indeed appropriate for such an exercise. It has enormous cultural depth, a point Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi is evidently aware of but does not systematically discuss. Her cursory discussion of the concept of the *lingam* in Dravidian culture is useful, but the fact that Sanskrit presents a semantic category of enormous depth and breadth cannot be ignored (e.g., see Apte 1965:816-17). Symbolizations and logical recombinations often play upon the multiple semantic domains of *lingam*, which may mean gender (rather than only the male gender); a mark, sign, icon, or token; a proof or evidence; a meaning-specifier; an effect or product; a subtle body (again, either male or female); and, among other things, an image of a god or goddess (and not only Śiva). Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's several "paradoxical" associations begin to fall into place against this background, and a correct, culturally sensitive direction is set for further analysis—even of transformations. Roughly, three overlapping semantic domains are easily distinguishable in the above list: grammatical, symbolic and iconic, and logical (disjunctive) relations and expressions. We need to know how these are linked to reveal that larger symbolic system that should be capable of yielding strata, ranges, and transformational zones of meaning and that may also let us know the intrinsic peculiarities (if any) of Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's "scenic opposite routes."

Opposites—"as if they were balls in the hands of a juggler"—receive sensitive treatment in this exercise, but we do not clearly know if this is dualism or some subtler domain which structuralism, as usually practiced, would avoid, leaving it to a finely tuned cultural analysis to handle. The practical and the metaphorical, the material and the mental have so grown in the orders of the *lingam* for millennia that to establish these dividers is to violate the logic of Indian cultural cognition and meaning (cf. Sahlin 1976 for a parallel symbolic argument from the Western cultural condition). The *lingam*, as a cultural locus, has "fashioned" such a wide range of meanings in India for so long that it differentiates but does not—cannot—divide. This is an integrity of the Indian cultural logic we cannot fail to notice. In evidence, a devotee (Appar) from the South characteristically offers *reversible* transformations between the bodily and the mental: "With body as [his] temple; with mind ever subject to him; with truthfulness as purity; with the light of the mind as his *linga*; with love (*bhakti*) as melted butter and milk together with the holy water; let us offer sacrifice to the Lord" (quoted in Dhavamony 1971:152).

The relational "arbitrariness" of the Indian "scenic routes" which attracts Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi has, in my view, a systemic cultural integrity that may be specifically Indian in logical and ideational emphasis but is neither capricious in symbolization nor unconstrained in relational properties. Only a misreading of the evolution of the Indian mind and its use of its expressive culture renders cultural specificity unique and creative "free associations" random rather than underwritten by

certain general cultural directions. Specificity is comparable, but uniqueness is not, and the latter attempts to maintain a cultural system incommunicado. I hope I have understood Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's notion of symbolic arbitrariness correctly as I make these general observations.

by WESTON LA BARRE

Department of Anthropology, Duke University, Durham, N.C. 27706, U.S.A. 16 iv 79

Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi unfortunately misrepresents the Freudian position, which does indeed stress the arbitrariness of symbols, as any reader of the standard statement by Jones (1961) would know. The proper contrast is between Freudian ad hoc empiricism and Jung's mystical archetypes—and, in fact, in the hands of some structuralists, symbols are often treated as closer to Jung's "universals," as in some panhuman dream-book. All that Freudians would aver (Fromm hardly speaks for Freud!) is that, since the human body is a cross-cultural phenomenon, body-image projections in symbols would tend to replicate one another—though Freudians would be much more sophisticated dynamically about supposed inverse cases. So confused are Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's dichotomies as to have us suppose that all schools do not concede that some symbolisms are "culturally inherited." Furthermore, the Chomskyan "true mental" language "universals" she chooses to espouse by no means represent standard opinion among linguists.

Freud's concepts of "overdetermination" and "condensation" make "polysemy" no new discovery. When Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi writes that "associations are interchanged with total disregard of Freudian theory," she ignores the fundamental tenet that the meaning of a Freudian symbol is its associations; and in this specific case she is manifestly ignorant of the voluminous analytic literature on "the woman with a penis" and its clinical meaning. It is tiresome to find false imputations to Freud still fearlessly demolished and disheartening to see parading of ignorance still taken seriously as intellectual commerce. Experienced clinicians would not be "surprised" at these Hinduist data, but they would understand their meaning better. What Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi has demonstrated, quite beautifully, is that even "obvious" symbols are by no means rigidly universal—a Freudian position quite opposite to Jung's.

by DERYCK O. LODRICK

Department of Geography, Humboldt State University, Arcata, Calif. 95521, U.S.A. 28 v 79

As a member of a discipline that has faced and, I trust, largely overcome its own ogre of deterministic thinking, I am sympathetic to the aims of this paper, yet I find myself unable to accept Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's views without serious reservations. Having dismissed both psychoanalytical and structuralist interpretations of symbols and arguing against the *universality* of meaning and the *relevancy* of context, the author, in her suggested element of caprice, seems to ignore the importance of both meaning and context in understanding symbols. Lack of mental constraints can theoretically lead to an infinity of symbolic associations, yet this infinity is certainly not apparent in the examples she has selected. Quite to the contrary, the consistency of the sexual symbolism, even though it involves the reversal of male and female associations, suggests that some constraints are at work—constraints that may originate in a universality of symbolic associations, in the Indian cultural tradition to which the symbols belong, or in other factors of which the observer may be totally unaware.

In Freudian thinking, the tree represents the male symbol par excellence, and, as Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi points out, there are numerous instances in which this association is seen in India. One might add to her list the *kapittha* or "monkey-erection" tree, identified variously as the wood apple, the mango, or the

cashew, whose shape is likened to a closed fist with the thumb poking out through the fingers like a monkey's phallus (Walker 1968:217). The tree is also seen as a source of fertility. On occasion I have observed Hindu women circumambulating a particular pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*) at Assi ghat in Varanasi (Benares), winding colored thread around the trunk in a ceremony to ensure their bearing many children. Such practices, as noted by Crooke (1896:99) and Frazer (1951 [1911]:51), are quite common throughout northern India. In this aspect, however, the tree is feminine, a symbol of the maternal energy of nature and ultimately of the source of all life, the Great Mother herself (Neumann 1955:48). Persistent echoes of this symbolism abound in India, from the tree-goddesses (*vriksa-devatas*) of mythology to the horned goddess, perhaps a mother goddess, shown standing in a pipal tree on seals recovered from Harappa and Mohenjo-daro (Basham 1954:23). In that much of Indian iconography may be traced back to the Indus Valley civilization and certain elements perhaps even to ancient Mesopotamia, cultural origins would seem to explain the female associations of the tree in India as adequately as universal symbolism.

In reality, symbols are circumscribed by their cultural settings and derive some measure of their meaning from their particular situation, whether this reflects merely the prosaic need to explain the siting of a Hindu temple or Zimmer's (1946:195) contention that Indian symbols serve to voice the underlying truths of Indian philosophy. Furthermore, where an object such as the tree has a dual, i.e., male/female, character, "the accent of [the] symbol depends in large measure on the . . . culture situation in which it is embedded" (Neumann 1955:49). With this in mind, I find no great difficulty in accepting a male association of the female breast or a female association of the snake in a society replete with apparent contradictions, reversals of roles, and associations of opposites. I do not see where the element of caprice enters the question, although I accept that the meaning of some symbols may not be understandable in terms of universal concepts or, indeed, any frame of reference known to us—which does not mean that none exists. If this is what Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi is trying to say, I find her choice of analogy somewhat cumbersome. Rather than wander around in a maze of scenic routes and scenic opposite routes, I prefer to remain on the highway, braving the jungle of the collective unconscious, on the one hand, and the slough of structuralism, on the other, but always acutely aware that highways, especially in India, may rapidly become byways or even disappear altogether.

by JOHN L. MCCREERY

299B Mansfield St., New Haven, Conn. 06511, U.S.A. 25 iv 79

In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud (1962[1900]:353) categorically states that symbols "frequently have more than one or even several meanings. Thus, the correct interpretation can only be arrived at on each occasion from context." Also, "in addition to symbols which can stand with equal frequency for the male and female genitals, there are some which designate one of the sexes predominantly or almost exclusively, and yet others which are known only with a male or female meaning" (pp. 358–59). Freud's next sentence is the one for which Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi takes him to task: "For it is a fact that the imagination does not admit of long stiff objects and weapons as symbols of the female genitals or of hollow objects . . . being used as symbols for the male ones." Freud does not rule out more abstract or nonsexual meanings for either set of symbols.

Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi discusses ten sets of symbols, but only two—pointed weapons and vessels—belong to types—weapons and hollow objects—which Freud insisted have definite sexual referents *if they have sexual referents at all*. The assertion that these symbols are sometimes used abstractly to represent gods and goddesses, regardless of sex, does not in fact contradict Freud's statements, which admit the possibility of these sym-

bols' having nonsexual meanings. As for the other eight sets, Freud himself stated plainly that there are symbols equally likely to have male or female meanings as well as those which usually, but not always, have one meaning or the other.

How does one know, moreover, that a symbol's sex-bound associations "have vanished"? Abstraction can "neutralize" them by making them logically irrelevant, but logic alone is an unreliable guide to the interpretation of symbols, which may—as symbols often do—convey contradictory messages. Why isn't it possible, for example, for a trident which represents a goddess to be an especially potent symbol of divinity because it associates, unconsciously, male genitalia with a goddess? Paradox, after all, is the very stuff of which powerful statements about divine transcendence are made, as the story of the lecherous Brahman's venerating Shiva in the form of his mistress's breast so aptly demonstrates.

I wonder, too, where Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi discovered that structuralism "stresses the arbitrariness of all symbols"? I would have said that the structuralist goal of revealing elementary structures underlying all symbolism pointed in the opposite direction. The search for a universal "logic in tangible qualities" (Lévi-Strauss 1970 [1964]:1) is hardly compatible with the view that symbols are arbitrarily constructed.

What Sperber (1975) attacks is the idea that symbols express already established meanings. He argues, instead, that symbols stimulate searches for meanings and thus contribute to the process of creating meanings. I would add the inference that, since this process depends on metaphorical or metonymical relationships between symbols and the meanings they evoke, these relationships cannot be purely arbitrary. They are limited by inherent properties of symbolic materials as well as cultural conventions.

by BALAJI MUNDKUR

Box U-42, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Conn. 06268,
U.S.A. 1 v 79

Anthropologists, psychoanalysts, and historians of religion who attempt to discern "meanings" hidden within the obscurities of symbols and myths face many obstacles. Some of these may be methodological (see Strensky 1973 and Hubbard 1973). Others are latent in information that defies facile hypothesizing. The obstacles posed by Hinduism are especially noteworthy not merely because some components of its high philosophies are intertwined with an extensive body of ritual practices in today's folk cults, but primarily because its ancient traditions are recorded in intelligible detail in an immense literature. This, moreover, is largely free from ambiguities like those found in less well-understood religions of other ancient civilizations such as the Mesoamerican or Egyptian and of scriptless primitive societies, whose mythologies are just as valuable as that of the Hindus for studying symbolic thought but more open to idiosyncratic interpretation. The potential of contradicting almost any rigid pronouncement on sexual symbolism in particular seems inherent in Hindu thought and customs.

Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's analysis is a welcome disclosure of this hazard. Drawing partly upon Beck's (1978:86) affirmation that "a symbol can evoke associations in its own right; it does not depend on a system of contrasts for its meaning," she makes a thought-provoking case of her simile of highways of symbolic thought—highways that yet encourage individuals to travel whatever "scenic opposite route" they may fancy. Using a group of Hindu divine symbols with sexual connotations, she demonstrates this flexibility with arguments that I find substantially appealing.

My disagreements with some of her Freudian speculations reflect my scepticism of that school but arouse fresh ideas concurring with her support for Beck. The ambivalences of sexual symbolism in many of the examples she discusses are obvious. I see little need, therefore, for psychoanalytical conjectures, par-

ticularly when she is intent on refuting deterministic theory. Referring to the aquatic lotus and its connections with the goddess Lakṣmī, why is water envisioned as "a predominantly female" symbol? Water is personified by Lakṣmī and by the riverine goddess Gaṅgā no more than the thunderstorm is personified by Indra, the rain cloud by Parjanya, and the rain by the Maruts, all male deities. Other gods intimately connected with waters are Varuṇa, Mītra, and Agni. The riverine goddess, Sarasvatī, has a male counterpart, Sarasvat, also riverine, whose fertilizing waters are invoked in Vedic hymns simultaneously with, and no less fervently than, those of the goddess (Macdonell 1897). At another level of abstraction, some of the Sanskrit synonyms for "water" are feminine, but others, such as *jalam*, *ambu*, *ambhas*, *udakam*, *vāri*, and *payas*, are neuter. As for the lotus, this is consistently the emblem not only of Lakṣmī, but equally of her consort Viṣṇu (whose icons bear a lotus in one of his four hands and one of whose epithets is *aravindakṣa*, "lotus-eyed"); of the god Śūrya (whose icon carries full-blown lotuses in each of its two hands); and of the creator god Brahmā (whose epithet is *padmaja*, "lotus-born"). She is correct, however, in recognizing the lotus as an emblem of divinities in general.

Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi quite properly mentions the semantic fusions of deity names, though her assertion regarding Lakṣminārāyaṇa is only a part of the story. It may be a man's name (the suffix refers to the god Viṣṇu), but it also pays tacit homage to the goddess (Lakṣmī) as clearly as when a man is named after Śankarī, the epithet of the wife of Śiva. The usage of conjoint names is particularly rooted in Tāntric traditions, but in these they reflect the supremacy of a deity's female aspect, or *śakti*, i.e., his female energy. Tāntric rituals conceptualize the god as seated in the middle of a lotus pericarp, next to his *śakti* or surrounded by several of them. It is only after prolonged prayers (*bhja*) to these females that the god's name is invoked. The supremacy of the female is evident from the Sanskrit adage *Śivah śaktivihīnaḥ śavaḥ* ("Śiva [envisioned] without his *śakti* is [merely] a corpse"). Tāntric *śakta* traditions include cult icons like the elephant-headed Gaṇeśāni (Vaināyākī). This *śakti* is described in one text as possessing swelling female breasts and feminine hips, but (italics mine) "*he* holds a golden chain in *his* hands" (Bhattacharya 1966:265).

On the other hand, Vedic traditions leave little room for semantically unresolvable subtleties like these. Vedic male deities are unquestionably male, and they dominate the pantheon totally. Even so, generalization is hazardous: The sexual individuality of the primordial parental divinities, the male Dyaus ("Heaven") and the female Pṛthvī ("Earth"), is often merged in some Vedic hymns, while in others *both* are spoken of as females or "mothers" (Agrawala 1972:2). Thus today the transsexual symbolism of the Hindus—shaped by historical factors no less than by obscure psychological drives—results from an amalgamation of a Dravidian heritage (which emphasizes chthonic and mother-goddess cults), Tāntric ideology, Vedic myths, and Upaniṣadic-Vedāntic monistic philosophy.

Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi invokes a trite psychoanalytical tenet by opining that, worldwide, the serpent's various male associations may be "reinforced by the image of the snake bite, suggestive of the perils of sex." Whether particular individuals or entire societies actually envision such an association, consciously or subconsciously, seems to me moot. In any case, it is a highly subjective, unconfirmable Freudian guess.

The "scenic opposite route" in respect to the *lingam* can lead us to unexpected views: Sculptures of a series of nine planetary deities, the *navagrahāḥ*, normally represent males and are anthropomorphic, the temple of Citrācala, in Assam, being unique in depicting them all as phalli draped with identifying colored cloths. Yet in cases elsewhere, one of the group, Ketu, figures as a female, partly serpent- and partly human-bodied

(Mitra 1965:18, 20). Labyrinthine Hindu iconography offers no confirmation of the Freudian view that weapons are not conceivable as female sexual symbols or hollow objects as male, though long, straight, and solid objects are considered to be apt phallic symbols. Of the emblems carried by deities (and personified for worship under the generic term *āyudha puruṣa*), the war club (*gadā*), the spear (*śakti*), and the axelike missile *hetī* are conceptualized as females, while the hollow conch shell (*śaṅkha*), despite its highly suggestive vagina-like cleft and ventral profile, is conceptualized as male. By contrast, the arrow (*bāṇa*), the discus (*cakra*), and the lotus (*padma*) are eunuchs (Gopinatha Rao 1914:287–90). The belief that “while examples confirming Freudian theory could have been multiplied *ad libitum* it would be more difficult to find new cases contradicting psychological assumptions” seems both questionable and statistically unproductive.

The implications of Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi’s theme extend beyond Hinduism. The Shuswap Indians (of the southern interior plateau of British Columbia) attach special significances to numerous species of plants. Palmer (1975:42–43) reports that these are chosen as symbols in diverse myths and taboos and used for medicinal purposes. Certain species are linked primarily to men and others to women. For example, the cinquefoil’s (*Potentilla anserina*) roots are considered female, but those of the bisquit plant (*Lomatium macrocarpum*) are male. The Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) is regarded as bisexual. The Shuswap may have their own rationalizations, but Freudians will probably interpret them anew on their behalf. The interchangeability of the sexual significances Hindus sometimes attach to trees and the custom of marrying male and female trees have a Shinto parallel: *Sakaki* trees are sacred in Japan, and those growing very close to each other near shrines are often literally tied in wedlock by means of a stout rope. Freudian sentiments are not of much help in explaining such customs. “As the trunk of a tree is usually long and solid,” says Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi, “it would seem well suited to becoming a Freudian phallic symbol, and trees often do evoke a male association.” Yet “female” tree trunks are no different in form; nor is there proof for her assertion that femininity is assigned to trees “less frequently” and may result from symbol-suggesting arboreal characteristics other than the trunk. A mural from Egypt representing a sycamore fig tree (what is the sex of the testicle-like fig?) illustrates this more eloquently than words can (fig. 1).

An example of divine sexual transformation that occurred under conditions quite different from the Indian is found in the ancient Near East. The general Semitic deity Ishtar (identified with the archetypal Sumerian Inanna) had a multiplicity of symbolic attributes and was regarded as female. In Mari, hymns refer to a bearded Ishtar, so the possibility exists that this deity was originally bisexual or of varying or indeterminate sex. Philologically, her name, together with some of her attributes, can be traced back through Eshtar to ʿAttar and its variants. In Ugaritic myths, there is both a female ʿAthart and a male ʿAthar ʿAriz. In southern Arabia, on the other hand, ʿAttar or Astar was strictly a male deity, worshipped up to the Islamic era (Jacobsen 1976:140; Ringgren 1973:59; Ryckmans 1951:41).

Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi’s psychoanalytic predilections do not invalidate her main argument. They seem, however, to cast doubt on the usefulness of conjectures about symbolism that are beholden to the psychoanalytic precepts of the Freudian, Jungian, Adlerian, or similar schools—particularly if one sympathizes, as I do, with Eysenck’s (1978) attack on their credibility. Writings involving psychoanalysis, he says, are unscientific and “characterized in general by premature crystallisation of spurious orthodoxies.” That is, they carry a high risk of misinterpretation.

The symbol-making propensities of the human mind seem to have little rhyme or reason. Moreover, they are complicated by

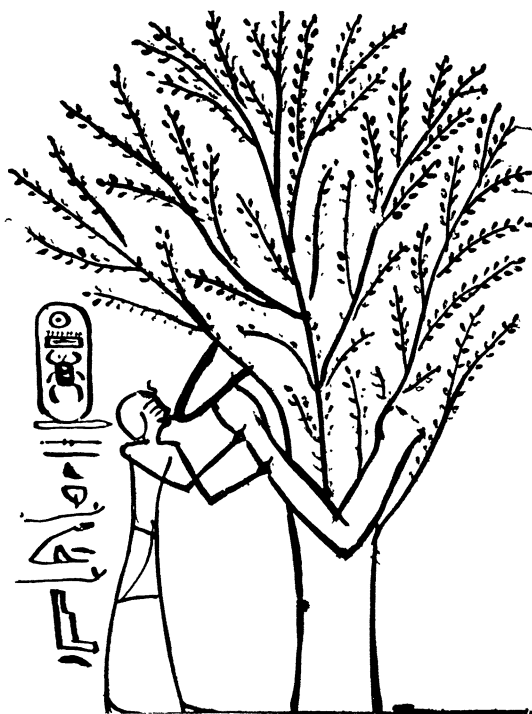


FIG. 1. Isis, in the form of a sacred sycamore fig tree, “breast-feeding” the Pharaoh Thutmosis III. Polychrome decoration, hypogeum of Thutmosis III, Valley of the Kings, 18th dynasty (reprinted from Mekhitarian 1954: 38 by permission of the publisher).

cultural history. Anyone who holds that hidden “meanings” of symbols and the motivations for particular choices are amenable to systematic explanation and generalization is bound to encounter formidable contradictions. Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi’s well-chosen simile of scenic opposite routes, more than that of highways, suggests caprice quite accurately.

by JACOB PANDIAN

Department of Anthropology, California State University, Fullerton, Calif. 92634, U.S.A. 31 v 79

The author’s discussion of interchangeability sheds much light on the multidimensional, multivocal dialectics in the use of symbols, but it appears to me that from the data presented it is impossible to conclude that there is any less arbitrariness or context-boundedness in symbolization. In the absence of a comprehensive statement of the function of “the scenic opposite route” and its importance in symbolization, this study corresponds to Frazer’s compilation of data to demonstrate the operation of magical thinking at certain levels of cultural development.

Although the author explains what she means by contextual interchangeability, there is some confusion as to how and whether the various historical, social, and regional levels of context interface or merge in all or some of the mythological and ritual contexts in Hindu India as a whole. For example, she notes that the *bhakti* and *śakti* traditions are conducive to conceptualizing reversals and that monistic philosophy may facilitate certain kinds of abstract reductionism; she also indicates that Hinduism in general may predispose believers toward greater freedom in the interchangeability of male and female symbols and that, in her view, only some Hindus can travel the “narrowest and steepest scenic opposite route.” She also makes references to certain regional contexts, and her data are to a large extent from the Dravidian south.

Egnor (1978) has pointed to a contrast between the Sanskrit and the Tamil cultural traditions in terms of the emphasis on the dominance of male or female principles, and this raises

the question whether it is accurate to assume the existence of a religious perspective relating dominance and maleness in Hindu India as a whole. According to Egnor (1978:174-75),

Sanskrit culture is male-dominated: the male is the locus of purity and the center of ritual. Tamil culture (as embodied in T. [the informant]) is female-dominated: the female is the locus of purity and the center of ritual. In Sanskrit the self *puruṣa* is male and the body *prakṛti* is female. In Tamil the self *uyir* is female and the body *āl* is male. In Sanskrit power is hard (so semen is called a "hard" substance and the teacher is *guru*, "heavy"); in Tamil power is soft.

In light of Egnor's interpretation and in terms of particular historical and social contexts, an analysis of the data from Tamil culture might show that the Tamils are not involved in "the scenic opposite route." For example, a biography of the Tamil poet and political activist Bharati might indicate that he used certain symbols to generate certain sociopolitical consequences; the symbolism of Tamil films, in general, has political implications, and such symbolism usually occurs in association with Tamil cultural nativism, symbolizing familial experience as an expression of the purity of motherhood; a historical study of the Tamil journal *Ananda Vikatan* might show it engaging in the revival, review, and interpretation of certain mythological representations which had little significance for a large number of Tamil-speaking non-Brahmins in order to engender a consciousness of Sanskritic Hinduism; and the "prize-winning student" from Nagercoil may have had a certain type of cultural experience by virtue of the fact that she was from Kanniyakumari district, which was for over two centuries part of the Malayalam-speaking, matrilineal, Nayar kingdom of Travancore, making it possible that no principle of interchangeability and reversal operated in her conception of Nagercoil as a place where Nāgaramman ("snake-mother") resides.

by GEOFFREY SAMUEL

Department of Sociology, University of Newcastle, Newcastle, N.S.W. 2308, Australia. 27 v 79

The main problem I find with Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's paper is the lack of clarity regarding the nature of symbolism. In this respect Sperber (1975), a book she cites in passing, might have provided a useful basis for argument, whether or not his conclusions are accepted in full (cf. Samuel 1977). I suspect that the vague use of "symbol" in her paper conceals that the symbolic statements she discusses are of two rather different kinds. The association between cow and *lingam* or between breast and *lingam* is surely of a different order to that between cow and female, breast and female, or *lingam*/phallus and male. It is not so much that we are temporarily switching from the "highway" of breast = female to the "scenic route" of breast = male as that the breast, with its female association, is being associated or equated with the *lingam*, which remains male. To draw a parallel with a more familiar myth, the virgin birth of Jesus has significance precisely because virgins in general do not give birth. The myth does not deny the paradox; it stresses it. Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's myths too seem to gain much of their point precisely from the paradoxical nature of the assertions made (cf. Sperber [1975:3-4] on the paradoxical nature of symbolic statements in general).

Such a distinction might help clarify the problem of context which arises throughout the paper. *Lingam* = male is context-independent, or, more precisely, its context is that of Hindu culture as a whole; *lingam* = breast occurs in the context of one particular myth. This helps to rescue the structuralists from Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's strictures. It also leaves them (and anyone else with appropriate techniques) with a job to do, since it is now possible to ask what the statement means in its context in this particular myth, a question that Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi generally evades.

Some of the other examples (e.g., trees and snakes) are of a different type. Here the problem is perhaps only that the

Indians do not systematically make the correct Freudian associations. Snakes are simply not consistently male (or female) in Hindu thought. This may be a problem for Freudian psychoanalysts, but I do not see why it should worry anthropologists (or Hindus) unduly.

However, Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi has brought forward some fascinating material in this paper, and it is good to see the wealth of local mythology in India being submitted to anthropological analysis.

by DAN SPERBER

33, rue Croulebarbe, 75013 Paris, France. 18 iv 79

Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's evidence, in spite of its intrinsic interest, does not warrant her conclusions.

Freud held that a symbol is, apart from its varied *conscious* associations, always associated with the same *unconscious* thought, which constitutes its meaning. Lévi-Strauss holds that the meaning of symbols is provided not by their *explicit* associations, but by *implicit* patterns of associations which can only be discovered by looking at whole symbolic systems. Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi offers an account of essentially conscious and explicit associations of Hindu symbols. That these associations do not always conform to what Freud says of unconscious ones or Lévi-Strauss of implicit ones is no evidence against their views. Incidentally, the same data could have been used against Freud's view in another way: as the author herself suggests, it is remarkable how often conscious associations do resemble what Freud says of unconscious ones. Since the same associations cannot very well be simultaneously conscious and unconscious, Freud seems to be right in the wrong place, i.e., wrong, though interestingly so.

I have argued that none of the many explicit, implicit, and unconscious associations of "symbols" are meanings: the perception of a symbol is not mentally replaced by the representation of an associate, as it would be if symbolic associations were true semantic relationships; rather, associations are extensions of symbols and equally open to interpretation. Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi maintains, on the contrary, that, since the associations she describes are stable and largely independent of the context, they constitute proper meanings. Without an acceptable definition of "meaning," however, this is an empty claim; with such a definition it would still be a non sequitur, since stability and autonomy may be necessary conditions but certainly not sufficient ones for a relationship to be one of meaning.

by HOWARD F. STEIN

Department of Family Practice, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, Oklahoma City, Okla. 73190, U.S.A. 24 iv 79

Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's ethnographic tour de force of Hindu religion's "highways," "scenic routes," and "scenic opposite routes" takes us everywhere but to the Royal Road to the Unconscious, Indian and panhuman. Symbols are of course arbitrary, which fact Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi documents exquisitely, but this does *not* refute a rigid *psychic* determinism. Yet the only way to get at the emic meaning of Hindu symbols is through the sequence of associations made by informants, not by observing, from without, kinship systems, language, and religion. One simply cannot make automatic inferences about psychological reality from the normative, ideological, symbolic, which is to say "cultural," levels. One can indeed discern in cultural texts unconscious themes and fantasies, but one can construct a sound interpretation from these impressions *only* through the intensive and intimate study of representative *persons*, so-called personal documents, and the associations to which *they* lead us. Four exemplary works that come immedi-

ately to mind are La Barre (1969), Erikson (1958), Koenigsberg (1975), and Stierlin (1976).

I am disturbed that, while the manifest communication of Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's paper is the interpretation of Hindu religious symbolism, the metacommunication is an attempt to disprove Freudian psychology. Using an Indianist metaphor, how often is it necessary to beat a dead snake? Or to set up a straw Freud? From a reading of this paper, one would think that Freud had never revised his thinking or that subsequent analytic research from Karl Abraham to Theodor Reik to Otto Rank to Ernest Jones had given us no new insights. Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (1914) may rightly be faulted for a decidedly Lamarckian view of how the primal murder of Laius by Oedipus is inherited as part of the racial memory. He subsequently learned, however, *by listening to his patients*, that even well-remembered childhood events were fantasies and not always reality. In the hands of anthropologists who, defensively it appears, have an axe to grind with regard to psychoanalytic psychology, Freud becomes an authoritarian conceptual tyrant, and all later clinical and ethnographic research is cavalierly dismissed. That the Baining of New Ireland classify the tape recorder as female because it is a hollow receptacle does *not* mean that they "think in psychoanalytic categories." What it *does* mean is that careful psychoanalytic investigation would reveal *why* the Baining perceive the tape recorder to be feminine. It is one thing for Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi to insist that meaning is subjective rather than objective, but quite another for her to stop precisely where the next stage of work ought to begin: determining why a particular subjective meaning is assigned to a neutral object.

In yet another misreading of Freud, she writes mistakenly that "Freud himself has created a bisexual symbol, speaking of the 'phallic mother,' an alleged product of infantile fantasies." To begin with, Freud did not create the phallic mother, but discovered this terrifying castrated-female-with-the-penis fantasy in his patients; the phallic mother is not a symbol, but an experienced reality; and finally, the experience in its awesome vividness can scarcely be called "alleged." While "male and female symbols and associations are interchanged with total disregard of Freudian theory and even anatomical distinction," I would want to know more about Hindu family dynamics and child development to understand how such interchangeability comes about and, moreover, the consequences of *specific* bisexual fantasies not only for Hindu cosmology, but for daily life.

To conclude: Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi has offered some tantalizing ethnographic material, but she departs from her highways and scenic routes onto a veritable detour in her polemic asides battling with a phantom Freud.

Reply

by GABRIELLA EICHINGER FERRO-LUZZI
Rome, Italy. 28 VIII 79

"Allen Leuten recht getan ist eine Kunst, die niemand kann" (Pleasing everybody is an art given to none). In reading the comments on my paper I was reminded of these concluding words of the well-known story of the father, the son, and the donkey advised by various people as to which should be carried and which should walk. La Barre and Stein rebuke me for having attacked Freud too much. Bharati wishes I had done so more, and Mundkur criticizes my psychoanalytic predilections. Mundkur would like to dispense with the "highways" and Lodrick with the "scenic opposite routes." Nevertheless, I thank all my commentators alike for their positive as well as their negative criticism. They have obliged me to look at some questions from a different angle, pointed out elements which had escaped my notice, and made me realize where the message

had not come through. The comments are so varied that in order to do justice to them all my reply would have exceeded the length of the original article. I have therefore had to make a selection and beg indulgence for some inevitable omissions.

Freudian questions. The sharpest criticism is raised by adherents of the Freudian psychoanalytic school of thought. I had expected this but was surprised at their vehemence. All I did was show that Freud's three types of sexual symbols—(1) those which can stand with equal frequency for the male and female genitals, (2) those which designate one of the sexes predominantly, and (3) those which are known only with a male or female meaning—must be reduced to two by merging the third with the second. McCreery reproaches me for not having mentioned the former two and for having overlooked the fact that Freud does not rule out more abstract, nonsexual meanings of symbols. I did not see any reason for discussing these points, since the purpose of the paper was to draw attention only to inversions not foreseen by Freud. It is not true, as McCreery asserts, that of my ten sets of symbols only two are among those which Freud insisted have definite sexual referents. Freud left no doubt that the tree, as a long, stiff object, falls in the same rigidly determined category, and the snake is for him always a phallic symbol. According to Ludwig's (1947:12–13) calculation, there are 21 and 28 things which for Freud regularly symbolize the male sexual organ and the female sexual organ respectively. (Jones [1972 (1948):110] outdoes the master when he writes: "Probably there are more symbols of the male sexual organ alone than for all other symbols taken together.") If this is so, it goes without saying that for Freud sculptured sexual organs, the *lingam* and the *yoni*, and mythological references to the female breast or the belly of a cow can at most have completely abstract meanings but can never designate the opposite sex. La Barre accuses me of misrepresenting "the Freudian position, which does indeed stress the arbitrariness of symbols, as any reader of the standard statement by Jones (1961) would know." The following quotation from Jones (1972 [1948]:104, italics mine) should correct his view: "A certain symbol can have two or sometimes more meanings, for instance, in dreams a room may symbolize either a woman or a womb. . . . But the possibility of variation in meaning is extremely limited and the noteworthy feature is its invariability in the different fields of symbolism." Here Jones can think only of the variability, between woman and a synecdoche of woman, not of a male symbolic meaning for the room. As to the snake, Jones writes (p. 108, italics mine): "The idea of a snake, never consciously associated with the phallus, is regularly so in dreams, since it is one of the most constant and invariable symbols." In a footnote (p. 134, italics mine) he concedes: "Very rarely it can also symbolize the intestine and its contents but, as far as I know, nothing else." In summary he enumerates six attributes of the true symbol, the second of which is "constant meaning or extremely limited possibility of variation" (p. 146, italics mine).

Stein reprimands me for writing as if Freud had never revised his position. Significantly, however, he mentions only revisions which do not touch the argument of my paper. The truth is that Freud did *not* revise his opinion on the wholly determined group of symbols, a fact which the quotations from Jones amply proves.

Though critical of many of Freud's tenets, I meant to attack only one of them. My Freudian commentators, however, force me to be more outspoken than I intended to be. La Barre charges me with ignorance of the literature on "the woman with a penis" and its clinical meaning and Stein with misreading Freud in saying that Freud himself created a bisexual symbol, the "phallic mother." I did not intend to imply that Freud created the image *ex novo*; my doubt referred to his

¹ All quotations of Jones are my translations of the Italian version based on the 1948 edition.

interpretation and generalization of this fantasy. I do not find anything "terrifying" in the image of a "phallic mother," but then I consider it not, as Stein does, as a "castrated-female-with-the-penis fantasy," but simply, as I pointed out, as an Ardhanārīśvara figure with inverted signs. My lack of goose-flesh in this regard is, of course, due to the fact that I do not share the belief in the castration complex and penis envy, derived from an overestimation of male genitalia. The "phallic mother" seems to haunt McCreery as well, when he asks "Why isn't it possible, for example, for a trident which represents a goddess to be an especially potent symbol of divinity because it associates, unconsciously, male genitalia with a goddess?" I would say that it is possible but not very likely, and I find my interpretation of weapons as abstract symbols of power vested in both gods and goddesses more plausible. It receives confirmation in the Hindu use of the term *śakti* for the weapon in the hand of a god and the fact that, as Mundkur pertinently points out, *śakti* means not only power but also spear.

Both Stein and Kakar argue that Hindu child development may be responsible for Hindu symbolic associations. This is, I think, a claim which can never be proven or disproven beyond doubt, but since psychological development continues throughout life I do not see why child development should be given pride of place. Kakar suggests that the relatively greater bisexuality of Hindu symbolism with regard to the snake may be due to the predominance in Hindu culture of the oral rather than the phallic level of development. I have two remarks on this point: Firstly, anthropologists have happily overcome their own preoccupation with developmental sequences and have abandoned the most fantastic among them, such as Bachofen's stages of social life or Lubbock's stages of religious thought. Psychoanalysts might do well to follow their example. Secondly, the complexity and subtlety of Hindu thought strike me as scarcely infantile.

Indian questions. I was pleased to see that the longest and most positive comments come from Indian scholars; I believe in the value of emic confirmations. Experts on India tend to agree with me that Indian culture predisposes to inversions and paradoxical associations. My contention, however, that these reveal an element of caprice is contested mainly by Appadurai, Khare, and Lodrick, who argue that there is no caprice because transformations and reversals are the essence of Hindu thought. I have three major objections to this view:

1. The glorification of arbitrariness, for instance, in the concept of Śiva's sports, does not abolish arbitrariness.

2. Despite the little interest in precise definitions and boundaries in Hindu thought, inversions and paradoxes are the exception and not the rule. I agree with Appadurai that transformations are very common. All *avatāras* fall under this category. Śiva, alias the bull Nandi, is also a transformation, but I would not call it a radical one, since the sex of the deity and the animal is the same. A bull lactating like a female breast is a much more radical transformation, a paradox, and hence considerably rarer. The only other transsexual transformation that comes to mind immediately is Viṣṇu = Mohinī, whereas there are many parallels to Śiva = Nandi in India and elsewhere. I am grateful to Mundkur for pointing out more "scenic opposite routes," in particular the conch shell as a symbol of Viṣṇu. Though no interchangeable symbol of gods and goddesses, the conch shell conceived as male is indeed surprising from a Freudian point of view. Interestingly enough, its connexion with Viṣṇu does not prevent it from having a female association as well. In South India the conch shell is strongly associated with milk, for instance, in the milk-pouring ceremony after the birth of a child. In a Tamil short story, milk not only crystallizes into a conch shell, but the latter automatically produces milk (as if it were a breast) whenever a child is born in the family (Ramamirtham 1975:174). I myself can contribute a further striking interchange of a common iconographic symbol. In the Śiva temple of Avadayarkoil, Tanjore district, Śiva is

not represented as a *lingam*, with or without *yonī*, but as the *yonī* pedestal alone (*āvutaiyār* in Tamil) (Census 1971: 423). Despite such additions—I said that my list did not claim to be complete—I repeat that examples contradicting the Freudian view are the "scenic opposite route" and not the "highway" and that there are certainly more snakes conceived as male symbols than as female ones, more *lingas* representing gods than representing goddesses, more gods appearing in the guise of a bull than of a cow, etc. Pandian denies my claim of arbitrariness, because for him my "scenic opposite route" would be the "highway" in Dravidian South India. I am surprised that a Tamil (judging from his name) can repeat Egnor's assertions uncritically as if they were generally accepted truth and not the opinion of one informant. No student of India would deny that Sanskrit culture is more male-dominated than Dravidian culture, but it is a far cry from this relative distinction to a categorical opposition. If Tamil culture is female-dominated, one wonders why Murukan is considered the typical Tamil deity and not, for instance, goddess Māriyamman. I am sure that Pandian will agree with me that Śiva is a god of Dravidian origin, but would he hold him to be less important than the various local goddesses? There are female ceremonies, of course, but would he consider *sumāṅgali* (an auspicious married woman—a Sanskrit term but almost certainly a Dravidian concept) worship on a par with the worship of Śiva or Kṛṣṇa? A woman's auspiciousness, it may be noted, is not intrinsic, but derived from her marriage. Given the greater concern with ritual purity and pollution in the Dravidian South than in North India and the fact that women alone bear the burden of two additional pollution periods (Pandian might like to consult my 1974 paper on this point), "the female as the locus of purity" does not sound quite right. I shall not discuss in detail the somewhat abstruse linguistic distinctions (*uyir* 'soul, life force' is neuter rather than feminine and normally opposed to *uṭal* 'body,' also neuter, rather than to *āl* 'person, male') but should like to rectify the following points: (a) Subramanya Bharati wrote both political and religious poems, and "Krishna My Mother" belongs to the latter group. (b) Some Tamil films have political implications (fewer than North Indian ones), but the snake film *Our Family God* definitely has not. (c) Rather than "engendering a consciousness of Sanskrit Hinduism," *Ananda Vikatan* aims to uphold traditional values, whatever their source. (d) Though Kanyakumari district used to belong to Kerala, which is more "female-dominated" than Tamilnad, this does not make the words of the student from Nagercoil less paradoxical, because she called "snake-mother" a deity known as "king of snakes." (Incidentally, this reference to snake worship in the weekly cannot be attributed to Sanskrit Hinduism.)

3. It is true that some of the most striking paradoxes discussed in my paper I called "scenic opposite routes" of symbolic thought along which perhaps only Hindus are willing to travel. This does not mean, however, that the process as such is limited to India, as Khare seems to think. (There is some mutual incomprehension; I have not grasped his distinction between specificity and uniqueness.) As nobody seems to have been impressed by the double association of the bald head in Europe, I should like to add another example of a striking inversion from a different field. Worldwide, "white" tends to evoke positive associations such as goodness and purity and "black" negative ones such as evil, impurity, and death. Again, these symbolic equations constitute only a particularly wide "highway" and are not absolute. The "scenic opposite route" leading to a positive view of "black" is not even particularly narrow. Turner (1967: 81) has pointed out that in many African societies black has auspicious connotations because of its association with rain-bearing clouds. The same association also exists in India, but I do not think that it is the only one permitting an

inversion of the usual negative image of black. Another possible reason may be that impurity and evil are just as much sources of power as purity and virtue and hence black may be regarded as magically potent and desirable. In addition to rain clouds, there are various other contexts in which black is not negative; in India, for instance, the black beads of the marriage necklace or the god Kṛṣṇa (*kṛṣṇa* means "black" in Sanskrit). However, the fact that Kṛṣṇa is often painted blue shows that the positive associations of black do not go very far. A negative association of white is more difficult to conceive and apparently absent in India. The Konso of Ethiopia, however, choose this narrowest "scenic opposite route." Among them white is associated with death and suggests dry animal bones (Hallpike 1972:280). This example may also help to explain better what I mean by arbitrariness. White bones have been seen by many other people, and they will not have liked the sight, but it has not occurred to them for that reason to discredit all whiteness.

Bharati and Appadurai point out that for Hindus the *liṅgam* does not simply represent Śiva but *is* Śiva. I agree—in ritual the identity of the idol with the deity is quite obvious—and I should have mentioned this fact for completeness's sake just as I mentioned that the *liṅgam* for many Hindus is the aniconic form of Śiva without any phallic connotation. However, since my paper is not about Hindu religion but about Hindu symbolism, since it is directed more to the anthropologist than to the believer, and since the distinction has no bearing on my argument, I shall abide by my terminology. Whereas in Hinduism concrete identification and figurative meaning exist side by side depending on the degree of belief or the degree of philosophical sophistication of the believer (the translators of the *Śiva Purāṇa*, for instance, speak of "the greatness of the phallic emblem of Śiva" (Kunst and Shastri 1970: chap. 5), in Western religion such latitude is not permitted. The controversy between Luther and Zwingli was precisely on the question of such a distinction. For Zwingli the wine and the Host stood figuratively for the blood and body of Christ; Luther insisted that they were concretely so, and this confirmed the split into two sects.

Mundkur and Lodrick comment on tree symbolism. I was delighted at Mundkur's picture of the arboreal breast-feeding Isis. Such a picture does not come as a surprise to me. I wrote, in fact, that with regard to the earlier examples offered traffic on the "scenic opposite route" is still fairly dense in India and elsewhere. The female association of the sycamore fig is probably due to the choice of the latex rather than the shape of the fig for analogy. As to the peepal tree, I clearly stated that it can be seen as male or female, and therefore it is not at all certain that the women circumambulating it conceive it as "the Great Mother." (Incidentally, the *kapittha* tree cannot be identified with the cashew; the latter was introduced into India at the time of the Portuguese.) Given the interchangeability of male and female associations of the peepal, it seems to me that nothing is to be gained by tracing the latter back to the Indus Valley civilization or Mesopotamia; doing so does not eliminate the element of caprice in the choice of the characteristic for association.

Campbell and Bharati would have liked me to extend my snake examples. Unfortunately, Indian snake symbolism is so rich that complete coverage would have filled at least a whole article, and therefore I had to make choices. *Kuṇḍalinī*, the snake power mentioned by Campbell, is another female association (*pace* Freud and Jones) of the snake in India (Avalon 1931:6). Bharati wonders whether the metaphor *nāgarājarūpa* did not find its way into Tamil lore. I have not come across it in temple legends, but it is certainly present in modern Tamil literature. Jeyakanthan (1975:69), for instance, speaks of "a tress like a black snake" and Ramamirtham (1975:161) of "the viperlike blackness of the hair." Women have long hair, and therefore the metaphor comes to mind more readily with regard to them, but in my view it is more the waviness and color of the

hair which suggest the metaphor than a definite association with woman; also, the matted hair of the mostly male ascetics may remind one of snakes. Mundkur reproaches me for invoking a trite psychoanalytic tenet in speaking of the snake bite as suggestive of the perils of sex. The intended emphasis of my sentence was on the greater frequency of the phallic association of the snake than its female association the world over. I did not mean to imply that all or even the majority of human beings are afraid of sex. In some people, however, such fears do exist, at least in fantasy. The myth of the *vagina dentata* found in tribal India and among American Indians cannot, to my mind, be interpreted otherwise.

Bharati and Mundkur question that water is a "predominantly female symbol," enumerating several Vedic male deities connected with water. Given the preponderance of male deities in the Vedic pantheon, those in charge of water are probably also in the majority. I would hazard the guess that, worldwide, male and female supernaturals connected with water may be about evenly distributed. In fact, the latter may slightly outnumber the former because they tend to appear in the plural (the water nymphs of Greek and Germanic mythology, for instance) while their masters are in the singular. In calling water a "predominantly female symbol" I did not mean the gender of the words for water or refer exclusively to water deities; I was speaking in a more general sense. A cosmic male/female distinction tends to associate sky and fire with man and the earth and water with woman (as "highways," but not in an absolute sense). Psychoanalysts will agree with me here, but even without enlisting their help Hindu mythology provides a good example. O'Flaherty (1973:256) speaks of "Śiva with Pārvatī, the *liṅgam* with the *yonī*, and fire in water—the three images of satisfaction on the levels of the myth, the cult and the symbol."

Bharati feels uncomfortable with my binary opposites of *liṅgam* and earth and *liṅgam* and water because of their lack of fit with the five element-*liṅgas*—and rightly so. In the former cases we are in the realm of binary opposites; in the latter we have left it behind. In addition to being images of satisfaction, O'Flaherty's opposites can be understood as images of totality, the whole world expressed through the conjunction of two polar opposites or salient features in a sort of shorthand. The myth of Gaṇeśa and the mango confirms this interpretation. Gaṇeśa wins the fruit because he quickly circumambulates his parents, Śiva and Pārvatī, instead of travelling around the world as Murukan does. Conversely, in the concept of the five element-*liṅgas* totality or the cosmic nature of Śiva is expressed *in extenso*, so to speak, by bringing the *liṅgam* into conjunction with every single element (I have voiced similar ideas elsewhere [1977:511–12]). The two procedures cannot be mixed—therefore the lack of fit noticed by Bharati—though it is sometimes possible to reduce the latter to the former.

Symbolism. Appadurai would have liked me to adopt Peirce's distinction between indexical, iconic, and symbolic signs, especially because the relationship between signs and their referents in Hindu religious thought would be mostly indexical and metonymic. Unfortunately, there is little agreement among the various authors who have proposed such terminological distinctions, and since I am unable to consult Peirce I do not know exactly what he means. His indexical sign apparently is not identical with Leach's (as smoke indicates fire; 1976:12), because in that sense none of my interchangeable symbols would be indexical. There also seems to be disagreement about the meanings of metonym and metaphor. In my view the tree, the snake, the white-anthill, the lotus, the weapon, the vessel, the cow, and the bull are all metaphors for deities; only the *liṅgam* and the *yonī* are metonyms, and hence the latter are much rarer than the former. I admit that I used "means," "represents," and "is associated with" as rough equivalents, but firstly a precise distinction did not seem necessary for my argument and secondly in Hindu thought itself

there are no clear boundaries, concrete identification and figurative representation existing side by side.

Sperber also takes me to task for lack of precision and for attributing meaning to symbols without an acceptable definition of "meaning." What if "meaning" were a polythetic concept impossible to define attributionally and exhaustively? Sperber himself notices that "the word 'meaning' has so many meanings that it always fits in somehow" (1975:8-9), but nevertheless he decides to reserve it for linguistic use. I concede that there are subtle differences between linguistic meaning and symbolic meaning, but to all intents and purposes symbols mean, and I do not see any reason that the notion of meaning should be limited to linguistic meaning alone.

Samuel notes that "the association between cow and *lingam* or between breast and *lingam* is surely of a different order to that between cow and female, breast and female, or *lingam*/phallus and male." I perfectly agree, and I called only the former two paradoxes. He remarks that "myth does not deny the paradox; it stresses it," a point I thought to have made amply clear in my discussion of the breast = *lingam* myth. He even reproaches me for generally neglecting to state what such paradoxes mean, though I did give interpretations of the breast = *lingam* myth and the lactating bull. This specification also partly answers Pandian's charge that without indicating the function of the "scenic opposite route" my study corresponds to Frazer's compilation of data. In my view, the breast = *lingam* myth has the religious function of demonstrating the excellence of the *bhakti marga* (the way to salvation by devotion alone) and the bull = breast myth the psychological function of reassuring people desirous of offspring. The element of caprice in the "scenic opposite route," however, makes it unlikely that functional utility can be found in all cases. Even where no function can be adduced, I do not think that my technique can justifiably be compared to Frazer's, since I have discussed my interchangeable symbols and paradoxical associations in the context of a culture I am familiar with.

Jarvie argues that anything can be associated with anything else on condition that a theory can be formulated that connects the two. I agree up to a point and have myself proposed three such theories. The tree examples correspond to Theory 1, the selection of different characteristics for association. The snake, the anthill, the ithyphallic yogi, and the bald head correspond to Theory 2, the same characteristic seen from different perspectives. Weapons, vessels, the *lingam*, the now added *yonī*, and the term "mother" correspond to Theory 3, sexual opposition transcended in a common denominator. The bull = breast, the breast = *lingam*, and perhaps the cow's belly = *lingam* I take for a subgroup of Theory 3. The associations in these cases are due to a common denominator, but, at least in the former two instances, the sexual connotation is not transcended; on the contrary, the resulting paradox is exploited for cultural purposes. The *lingam* = cow, the cow = *śalagrāma*, and the lotus = *lingam*, however, do not correspond to any theory, as far as I can see. The only thing shared by the two elements brought into conjunction is their cultural value (for a similar observation on cultural value's being responsible for the inclusion in a concept of elements which logically do not belong there, see Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi n.d.). Caprice lies in the selection of the characteristic and the perspective as well as in the invention of the paradox.

Jarvie further proposes two main possibilities accounting for the popularity of a theory. The first, that "a theory diffuses because of its coherence with other theories," I accept but hold to be more applicable to scientific theories than to symbolic associations. If Darwin's "survival of the fittest" is accepted as dogma, all subsequent theories of physiological and cultural selective advantages make beautiful sense. Conversely, my three theories do not depend on any coherence with other theories. Jarvie's second possibility, that "a theory diffuses because of its success," seems obscure to me. I cannot think of

any example confirming his assertion that "a theory that successfully explains and predicts phenomena and facilitates the development of effective technology opens the way for symbolic associations." My interchangeable symbols certainly do not fall into this category. No theory that explains or predicts snake bite or facilitates the extraction of snake venom can reasonably lead to a male or female association of the snake.

De Leeuwe states that symbols and structures are not innate, but acquired and learned. My similes of "highway," "scenic route," and "scenic opposite route" were precisely an attempt to tackle this vexed problem. Symbolic associations are not innate in the sense that we cannot help making them, since we have the choice of "scenic routes" and "scenic opposite routes"; nevertheless, there is a pronounced tendency to prefer some to others. I cannot see how structures can be derived from experience, and while I agree that the majority of symbolic associations are learned I argue that not all of them are. For instance, innumerable symbols are based on the concept of the warm color red and the cold color blue (an intuition confirmed by the places of red and blue on the wave spectrum). I would call blood the prototype of red in nature, but blood is no warmer than urine and mother's milk. Since we are likely to see and feel the latter earlier and more frequently than the former, if experience were responsible yellow and white would be the warm colors rather than red. I would call the sky the prototype of blue in nature. Since the sky, however, is bluest when the sun shines and is not particularly cold, the coldness of the color blue cannot be based on experience. I suspect that the coldness of green is not based on experience either, though the presence of green, i.e., vegetation, corresponds to relative coolness in most parts of the world except the Arctic. In order to decide the question I should like to know the Eskimos' idea of green.

I have more serious reservations about De Leeuwe's attempt to link the choice of male and female symbolic associations to social structure, the social position of the sexes, and the level of the productive forces. It is hardly possible to conclude from the more frequent interchangeability of male and female symbols in India than in the West that Indian society is more egalitarian than Western society, and I do not think that the phallus has acquired female associations in the Soviet Union now that women drive tractors and work in mines.

Structuralism. McCreery wonders where I discovered that structuralism stresses the arbitrariness of all symbols. I admit that the sentence as it stands and taken out of context may give rise to misunderstanding. Both psychoanalysts—Jung more than Freud, as La Barre rightly points out—and structuralists are determinists, but their determinism is of different nature. For Freud it is the sexual meaning of a number of symbols that is determined; for the structuralists it is the underlying structure. Symbols may take on various meanings according to their place in the structure in relationship to other symbols. Their meaning is thus not determined once and for all and arbitrary in that sense. Saussure (1968 [1916]:91) raises the arbitrary character of the linguistic sign to the status of a principle. Lévi-Strauss (1955:51) espouses this view, adapting it to his interpretation of mythological thought and opposing it to Jung's "archetypes" and a certain psycholinguistic school of thought. Even a sexual symbol like hair, Hershman (1974:292) argues, can be used to signify nonsexual values in the social context.

Samuel seeks to rescue the structuralists from my strictures, pointing out that the *lingam* = breast occurs in only one myth and hence is context-dependent, while the context of the *lingam* = male is that of Hindu culture as a whole. In reply I should like to repeat that just as I never intended to refute the whole of Freud's theory of symbolism, so I never intended to contest the importance of context for symbolic meanings; I only wanted to show that context is not always relevant. My campaign is

directed against absolute mental and cultural laws, not necessarily against tendential ones. I drew attention to the fact that the peepal tree may be seen as male or female according to its conjunction with other trees and that the snake in the Tamil film was called "mother" or "king" in different contexts. On the other hand, the context of the *liṅgam* = male (or, rather, exclusively male) is *not* the whole of Hindu culture, but only the greater part of it. In exactly the same context of temple worship Śaiva couples are paradoxically represented by two *liṅgas* or two combined *liṅgam-yoni* idols in Maharashtra, while elsewhere one *liṅgam* or one combined idol occurs.

Linguistic questions. I was amused by Bharati's Western parallel to my Indian verbal fusion of male and female elements. *Minākṣisundarēśvara* and similar names, however, are more striking, since they contradict the near universal that the masculine gender is extended to include the feminine and not vice versa (since this is a linguistic near universal, Whorf need not be invoked). I am sure that English-speakers would not tolerate "Mr. and Mrs. Mary Williams."

La Barre reproaches me for espousing the idea that true mental universals exist only in language and the related field of kinship systems and terminologies—which would by no means represent standard opinion among linguists. Campbell would have liked me to be more explicit on this subject. I do not know whether all linguists accept Greenberg's (1968:145) several hundred universals, but nobody can deny, I think, "that every language contains some nonempty class of phonetic segments with the feature of consonantality and some such class with the feature of vocality" (pp. 139–40) or that there does not seem to exist a kinship terminology in which "father and mother's brother are covered by a single kin term, while the father's brother is given a separate name" (Greenberg 1970: 108). If exceptions were to be found I would welcome them because another bit of absolute determinism would have to go, but the chances are very slim that this will happen.

Khare raises the important point that the linguistic meaning of the term *liṅgam* may have opened the way to an inversion of its iconographic meaning. It is true that both Sanskrit and Tamil dictionaries give the first meaning of the term as "sign, symbol, token" and only the second or third meaning as "Śiva's phallus." It can be argued that the term passed from the completely abstract to the nonspecifically sexual, as in grammatical gender, to its specifically male connotation. Despite the dictionary meaning (is it certain that the term *liṅgam* is originally Sanskrit?), I have argued the other way round—from the specific to the general, from the sex-bound to the abstract—because of the much more frequent use of the *liṅgam* as *Śivaliṅgam* than as the symbol of other deities and because of the first association evoked by the term *liṅgam*, which is certainly Śiva.

The unconscious. The controversial problem of the unconscious cuts across the disciplines of psychoanalysis and structuralism and is taken up in particular by Stein and Sperber. Stein criticizes me for arriving at the emic meaning of Hindu symbols from without. Observation, the questioning of informants, and the consultation of written material are discounted, the only way of arriving at a sound interpretation being "through the sequence of associations made by informants," hence a psychoanalytic study. I have two objections to this view: (1) Idols and symbols occurring in legends are not strictly personal creations. Lévi-Strauss has remarked that through oral transmission the accidental elements of a myth are eliminated and only the crystalline parts remain. I think a similar process occurs at the level of the individual symbol. Purely personal symbolic meanings would not find currency in a legend, and the purely personal whims of a sculptor would not be tolerated in an idol, which has to be approved by the temple authorities and also indirectly by the worshippers. An intimate study of representative persons might reveal either the same associations as ordinary fieldwork or private ones which might blur the picture.

(2) I question the necessary opposition between conscious and unconscious themes and fantasies. Stein is so deeply persuaded of the necessary opposition between apparent and hidden, explicit and implicit, that he even finds it in my paper. He writes: "I am disturbed that, while the manifest communication of Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's paper is the interpretation of Hindu religious symbolism, the metacommunication is an attempt to disprove Freudian psychology." I would remind him that I stated quite explicitly that the main purpose of my paper was to refute the rigid part of Freudian determinism with the help of Hindu examples. The interpretation of Hindu religious symbolism would have required book space.

Sperber is equally convinced of the irreducible opposition between conscious and explicit associations and unconscious and implicit ones and asserts that, since I offer the former and Freud and Lévi-Strauss are concerned with the latter, my evidence is not conclusive. The argument that the same associations cannot be simultaneously conscious and unconscious contains a serious flaw. They cannot be so in the individual, but they may very well be in different individuals in the same community. For India I mentioned the case, confirmed by Bharati, of the phallic connotation of the *liṅgam*, conscious in some Hindus but not in others. Leach (1958:155) has made the same observation: "in South India and Ceylon 'explicit' and 'displaced' phallic symbols are used side by side." He speaks of unconscious symbols as "displaced," since he is convinced as I am that what is unconscious need not be repressed.

Conclusion. I should like to make a few more remarks on my similes of "highways," "scenic routes," and "scenic opposite routes" of symbolic thought. My paper is primarily concerned with the latter and intended to make a case for an element of caprice in symbol formation, with the object of refuting rigid mental determinism. I have insisted on "an element of caprice" because the "scenic opposite route" is mentally tied to the "highway" and hence not altogether free. Just as I am intrigued by the "scenic opposite routes"—the "scenic routes" are adequately explained by context—so I am intrigued by the existence of mental "highways," i.e., the extraordinary predominance of certain ways of thinking over other equally possible ones. "Highways" are not only found in symbolic thought. I have called our tendency to think in binary categories another "highway" because in making classifications there are also "scenic routes," though no "scenic opposite route." One such "scenic route" would be a triple division—not just two extremes and a mediator or a redundant addition to a pair of opposites, which leave the binary principle intact, but the triple groupings so popular in folktales or the triads which cannot, or can only with difficulty, be reduced to dyads. In the Hindu *trimurti*, the preserver mediates between the creator and the destroyer; in the Christian Trinity the Holy Spirit does not so obviously mediate, since the Father and the Son are not opposites, and considering its little importance in comparison to the other two terms it seems to have been added mainly for the sake of the triad. Another "scenic route" of classification would be the pentad favoured in India. The ideal of the pentad is also often achieved at the cost of some artifice, for instance, in the five products of the cow, which could be easily augmented (Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1977:513), or in the five activities of Śiva, in which conferring grace and hiding seem to serve mainly to complete the number five. "Highways" of thought also exist in wrong assumptions falsifiable even without advanced technology and statistics. One example is the belief in the harmful effects of menstrual blood. Though no inevitable thought, it exists in the majority of communities all over the world. It does not depend on the level of civilization, because it is absent among the "wild" Veddas least influenced by the Sinhalese (Seligmann and Seligmann 1969[1911]:139) while anthropologist Neumann (1977:414) still clings to it. Another example is the belief that snakes love milk, occurring in a great number of

communities at various levels of civilization despite its intrinsic unlikeliness.

I hope to have at least partly satisfied my commentators, clarified what remained obscure in my paper, and provided some more food for thought.

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Author(s): Alex Wayman

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O, THAT LINGA !

By

ALEX WAYMAN

Introduction

The term *linga* and what it stands for, have been treated with much earnest discussion in books about Śaivism. It is clear that the term has varied meanings in grammar, the six philosophical systems of India, and in the traditions of Buddhism, Sāṃkhya, and Śaivism. The term occurs in trenchant passages of Indian literature. Why does the investigation cut across the normal boundaries of these systems ? I suppose it is because the great religious systems of Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism, and Buddhism contended with each other for many centuries, each becoming deeper and broader — their texts becoming increasingly subtle in connotations, their art depictions rich in symbolism. This must be the reason that their texts are replete with terms that pose knotty problems for translators. The term *linga* stands out in this sense ; and there seems no limit to the amount of references an investigator could make to other works, and still perhaps remain bewildered. And there is a danger of rushing in, according to the saying, “ Fools rush in where angels fear to tread ”. So we should take care to give each aspect its due. But there is another saying, “ Art is long and time is fleeting ”. I shall try a compromise — not treating the topic as I have noticed others to do, from one aspect alone ; even so, treating each aspect cursorily, and hoping that an over-all picture will emerge of what this term *linga* is all about — not shirking decisions, not afraid of the truth ; hoping that breadth of coverage will somehow communicate the essentials. That is why the treatment begins with the meaning of the term in lexicons, then in the six systems of Indian philosophy ; and as a subtle body, before moving on to the more controversial issues. It is a fascinating topic — well worth the considerations. The conclusion will report on whether the term *linga* has an underlying significance with metaphorical extensions, or is employed in irreducibly different senses.

Linga as grammatical gender

In grammar (*vyākaraṇa*) and lexicography (*abhidhāna* or *koṣa*) the term *linga* is employed for the three genders and is itself of neuter gender, related to a verb *liṅg-*, to go. Among the forms attributed to this root are *liṅgayati* (to inflect a noun according to its gender), *ālīṅgita* (embraced) ; and compounds, *trilinga* (possibly the three *guṇa*-s), *trilingaka* (having the three genders), and

liṅgavṛtti (a religious hypocrite). Commentaries on Amarasimha's *Nāmaliṅgānu-śāsana* (the *Amarakoṣa*), the *saṃkirṇa-varga*, k. 1, use the terms *strī* (feminine), *pumśaka* (masculine), or *napumśaka* (neuter). Besides terms that are one or other of these three genders, there are pairs of terms that represent two of these genders. Taking suggestions from this celebrated lexicon, and its commentary the *Padacandrikā*.¹ I shall give a mere sketch of words going with the three genders, and then some examples of the gender pairs.

The feminine includes such words as *niśā* (night), *vīṇā* (lute), *horā* (two-hour rising period of a zodiacal sign); *rajanī* (night), *vallī* (earth); *avani* (river); *dhi* (cognition), *śrī* (glory), *hrī* (modesty); *dhenu* (cow), *bhrū* (eyebrow), *drū* (wood, or taking any shape desired), *bhū* (earth); certain words of consonantal endings, thus *vāk* (speech), *dik* (direction), *kakud* (summit), *vidyut* (lightning), *āśir* (mixture); with numbers, such as *ṣaḍaṅginī* (a six-limbed, i. e. complete army). Also names of females, e. g. *strī* (woman), *kanyā* (girl); *yoṣit* (lady).

The masculine includes such words as *svarga* (heaven), *vetāla* (vampire), *kara* (ray of light), *pudgala* (the body), *gola* (globe), *malla* (wrestler), *kāma* (desire), *stana* (female breast); *adri* (mountain), *agni* (fire), *namuci* (preventing rain), *plukṣi* (scorching fire), *muni* (hermit); *prḍāku* (viper), *paṅgu* (planet Saturn, crippled in movement), *ketu* (brightness), *tantu* (cord), *adhvaryu* (kind of priest); many plant names, e. g. Arbuda, Aśoka, Kedāra; words for road, e. g. *mārga*, *patha*, *adhvan*; and associated movement, e. g. *eva* (course; m. pl. manner of acting), *naya* (conduct), *nayana* (leading), *neṣṭr* (who leads forward the sacrificer's wife). Also names of males, e. g. *nara* (a man), *jina* (conqueror), *ṛṣabha* (bull), *rājan* (king).

The neuter includes such words as *asra* (blood), *āśya* (mouth), *āsana* (posture), *kendra* (center of circle), *jala* (water), *puṣpa* (flower), *sukha* (pleasure), *duḥkha* (pain); *akṣi* (eye), *dadhi* (coagulated milk); *jatu* (lac); *dhāman* (home), *pakṣman* (eyelashes), *karman* (action), *janman* (birth), *nāman* (name), *heman* (gold); many finals in -s, e. g. *tamas* (darkness), *namas* (obeisance), *nabhas* (clouds), *yajus* (sacrificial formula), *yaśas* (fame), *retas* (seminal fluid), *saras* (flowing water), *enas* (sin); various words for mind, e. g. *citta*, *manas*, *viññāna*.

Now for the gender pairs, in case of feminine-masculine pairs, there are of course innumerable examples of the feminines of masculine nouns, e. g. *trilokī*, f. of *triloka*, m. Then there are such pairs as *keli* (sport), m. and f., *virāj*

1. *Padacandrikā on the Amarakoṣa*, tṛtiya-kāṇḍa (Sanskrit College, Calcutta, 1978).

(sovereign), m. and f. For feminine and neuter, there is, e. g. *svasti* (well-being); also *sabhā* (group), but when 'group of' the compound is neuter, thus : *dāśisabham* (group of female slaves), *nṛpasabham* (meeting of kings), *rākṣasa-sabham* (multitude of demons). For masculine and neuter, there are *candana* (sandlewood), *kabandha* (barrel); also, *jagat*, n. (moving beings, animals, men), m. pl. (people, mankind). There are also examples of words susceptible of all three genders, e. g. *reṇu* (dust). Of course, when a given term is found with different genders, these may reflect different significances of the term.

Liṅga-P. II, 19, relates references by words of masculine gender to Rudra (= Śiva) and those by feminine gender to Gaurī (= Umā):²

pulliṅgaśabdavācyā ye te ca rudrāḥ prakīrtitāḥ /
strīliṅgaśabdavācyā yāḥ sarvā gauryā vibhūṭayaḥ //

“All those expressed by words in the masculine gender have Rudra.
All those expressed by words in the feminine gender have the
glory of Gaurī.”

Since there is no mention of the neuter-gender words in this connection, the implication is that this object-class by words has both Rudra and Gaurī.

Liṅga as sexual differentiation

The usage of the term *liṅga* as sexual differentiation involves the sense of 'sign'; so *Amarakoṣa*, Saṃkīrṇa-varga, k. 15 B: *nikāro viprakāraḥ syād ākāro liṅgam iṅgitam*,[†] with the meanings 'hint', 'sign', 'token'. And *Amarakoṣa*, Nānārtha-liṅga, k. 25, *golīṅga* (the sexual sign of a cow), either male or female.

Of great importance for this usage of *liṅga* is a passage in Pt. Sukhlalji's Jaina commentary on Vācaka Umāsvāti's *Tattvārthasūtra*, Dixit's translation here summarized: *Liṅga* as characteristic sign is male, female, or neuter and has another name, *veda*. The three are each of two types, *dravya*, external sign; and *bhāva*, specific desire. The male *liṅga* or *veda* is predominantly the (external sign) hard and craves connection with the sexually soft sign; its craving manifests soon, and calms down soon, like hay fire. The female is predominantly the soft element, and craves connection with the sexually hard sign; its craving does not manifest soon, and does not calm down soon, like cow-dung fire. The neuter is a mixture of the other two, with desire for connection with a male sexual sign as well as with a female sexual sign; its craving takes an extremely long

2. I use the edition of *Liṅga Purāṇa*, ed. by J. L. Shastri (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1980).

[†] The actual text of the quarter 6 is: *ākāras tv iṅga iṅgitam* (Editor).

time to calm down, like a heated brick.³ Notice this usage of *liṅga* thus clarified as a craving direction toward a particularized external sexual sign — a sense of the term that will subsequently help to explain the Śaivite *liṅga*. In particular, the neuter is not the absence of the male and female, but both.

The sexual differentiation can be symbolic. So the text *Mayamata* describing the symbolical representations called *liṅga*. According to Dagen's translation, the 'male' stone is perfectly cylindrical, and gives off the sound of an elephant bell; the 'female' stone has a wide bottom and narrow head, and gives off the sound of cymbal; the 'neuter' stone has a narrow top and bottom, a wide median part and gives off no sound.⁴

And the sexual differentiation can be legendary or mythological. Thus, Karmarkar from the *Bhaviṣya-P.*:

The eighth Kalpa is known as the Liṅga-Kalpa. Dharma was the Supreme Being. From Dharma was born desire (Kāma) and from Kāma (or on account of Kāma) the Liṅga divided itself threefold, i. e. Pulliṅga (Male), Strīliṅga (Female), and Kīlba-liṅga (Neutral). From the Pulliṅga was born Viṣṇu, from Strīliṅga was born Indirā, and from the third Śeṣa (Serpent).⁵

The myth is significant. It suggests that from the desire (Kāma) of male variety one can evoke the deity Viṣṇu, from that of female variety can evoke the goddess and from that of neutral variety one can evoke the Asura class, here called 'Serpent'. To read some of the Western accounts of Śaivism one would have expected the *Bhaviṣya-P.* to credit the male variety of Kāma to Śiva. The situation is that a perusal of a limited portion of Indian scripture may lead one to this or that theory that is apparently well founded; and even so, is premature, should be abandoned when one grasps the wider implications. The trouble is that some researchers develop a 'vested interest' in defending the conclusions from their limited range of considerations. As to the word 'Dharma', the Puruṣa hymn (*Rg-Veda*, X, 90, 16) employs the plural *dharmāṇi*, apparently to apply to the three-fourths, while Puruṣa is one-fourth in man. According to the *Kāṭha-Up.*, II, 1, 14, which also uses the plural, it is by observing these *dharmas* as separate (*prthak*) that one chases after them; and this is presumably the meaning of saying "from Dharma was born desire". By implication the *dharmas* (so also the Sāṃkhya *guṇas*) are distinct although not really separate.

3. Pt. Sukhalalji's *Commentary on Tattvārtha Sūtra of Vācaka Umāsvāti*, tr. by K. K. Dixit (L. D. Institute of Indology, Ahmedabad, 1974), pp. 123-5.

4. *Mayamata: an Indian Treatise on Housing Architecture and econography* tr. by Bruno Dagens (Sitaram Bhartiya Institute of Scientific Research, New Delhi, 1985), p. 308.

5. A. P. Karmarkar, *The Religions of India; Vol. I, The Vratya or Dravidian Systems* (Mira Publishing House, Lonavala, 1950), p. 85.

Līṅga in the Six Darsāna-s

It is of course not more possible than to give here a bare indication of the term *līṅga* in the six philosophical systems of India. There is a valuable aid for such an investigation in the text *Ṣaḍdarśanasūtrasaṁgrahaḥ* [*Ṣaḍ*] ed. by Swami Dwarikadas Shastri (1984).

The *Pūrvamīmāṃsā-sūtra* [*PM-Sū*] and the *Vedānta-sūtra* [*V-Sū*] may be taken together for our purposes. Consultation of the *Ṣaḍ* index shows a large amount of references to *PM-Sū* with the expression *līṅgadarśanāc ca*, meaning something like, "And also because we have found (or, noticed) an indicative sign," where the 'indicative sign' is in a Vedic passage.⁶ Then we turn to *V-Sū*, the particular *sūtra*, *līṅgabhūyastvāt tad dhi balīyāḥ tad api*, numbered in the commentaries 3. 3. 43, or .44, or .45. The four commentaries which I employ in English translation are those of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Baladeva and Śrīkaṇṭha.⁷ The translators agree in rendering *līṅga* as 'indicatory mark(s)'; the *bhūyastva* as 'majority of', 'plurality of'; *tad dhi balīyāḥ* as "for, it is stronger (than the context)". But while the Baladeva commentary takes *tad api* as whatever else is stipulated,⁸ the other three commentaries agree that *tad api* means that the preceding is also stated in *PM-Sū*. Certain translators identified the particular *sūtra* of the *PM-Sū*, namely, 3. 3. 14: *śruti-līṅga-vākya prakaraṇa-sthāna-samākhyānām samavāye pāradaurbalyam arthavi-prakarsāt* / "While there is an intimate association of scriptural text, indicatory mark, entire statement, context, place, and name, there is *pāradaurbalyam* (the inferiority of each following member of a series to the preceding), due to (their respective) remoteness from meaning." The passage of *PM-Sū* immediately shows that all four translators erred in rendering the expression

6. This appears to be the meaning in the many passages with the term in Madeleine Biardeau, *Théorie de la Connaissance et philosophie de la Parole dans le brahmanisme classique* (Mouton & Co., Paris 1964).

7. These are: *The Vedānta Sūtras of Bādarāyana, with the Commentary by Śaṅkara* tr. by George Thibaut, Part II (Dover, New York, 1962). *Srī Bhāṣyam*, tr. by Diwan Bahadur V. K. Ramanujachari (publ. by author, at Kumbhakonam, 1930). *The Vedānta-Sūtras of Bādarāyana with the Commentary of Baladeva*, tr. by Rai Bahadur Srisa Chandra Vasu (reprint, New Delhi, 1979). *Śrīkaṇṭha-Bhāṣya*, tr. by Dr. (Mrs.) Roma Chaudhuri (Pracayavani, Calcutta, 1959).

8. The Baladeva commentary, tr., p. 577, takes the *tad api* as "study, meditation, etc.". This position apparently agrees with the *Vasiṣṭha Saṁhitā*, of which the Yoga Kāṇḍa has been edited and commented upon by Swami Digambarji, et al (Kaivalyadhama S. M. Y. M. Samiti, Lonavala, Poona, 1984); cf. p. 5, insisting on the combination of *jñāna* and *karma*; and saying, "It is only due to Śaṅkara's scathing attack, we feel, that this view [that both knowledge and works are necessary] was finally dislodged from the minds of the people. Rāmānuja and other teachers tried to raise this opinion in popular esteem, but with little success."

bhūyastva in terms of number, e. g. 'abundance of'; rather it must mean 'a greater degree of'. Thus, the particular *sūtra* of *V-Sū* may be rendered: "Since the indicatory mark is a greater degree; for, it is stronger (than the context). That also (is said in *PM-Sū*). " As I studied these commentarial translations, it seemed to me that the degrees of strength were in terms of pairs, namely, *śruti* and *liṅga* the strongest, next in strength the *vākya* and *prakaraṇa* and weakest the *sthāna* and *samākhyā*. The *śruti* means the Vedic words of *mantra* together with *liṅga* (indicatory power) to penetrate understanding. This is stronger than the *vākya* (such as the Upaniṣadic *vidyā*, or meditative passage) with its *prakaraṇa* (context), since one must meditate in order to get the meaning.⁹ And still weaker is the *sthāna* (place) and *samākhyā* (name), for getting the meaning. In particular illustration of how the *liṅga*, which is mandatory for worship of Śiva, is construed as of higher degree than the context, one may consult the *Śrikanṭha-bhāṣya* on *V-Sū*, 3. 3. 43, to notice the injunction that Śiva, the spouse of Umā, is the object to be meditated on in all the *Parā Vidyā*-s. This is sometimes called the Samaya type of Śiva worship, i. e. to find Śiva in every place of worship, the *sthāna*, whatever the deity's name, the *samākhyā*; to respect the associated full scriptural assertion with its context, the *vākya* and *prakaraṇa*; but find therein the Vedic mantra such as "That is Brahman" with indicatory mark, the *śruti* and *liṅga*—thus the Samaya type of Śaivite worships Śiva (or Śiva and Umā) in all those places, calling this a worship of the *liṅga*.¹⁰

For our purposes, we may also take together the *Sāṃkhya* by the *Sāṃkhya-kārikā* [*S-kā*] and the *Sāṃkhya-pravacina-sūtra* [*SP-Sū*], and the *Yoga* by *Yoga-sūtra* [*Y-Sū*]. *S-Kā* 52, has the terms *bhāva* and *liṅga* that were provided more special senses above from a Jain source that help for more general senses intended here :

na vinā bhāvair liṅgam, na vinā liṅgena bhāvanirvṛttiḥ /
liṅgākhyo bhāvākhyas tasmād dvididhaḥ pravartate sargaḥ //

"Without inner dispositions, there would be no objective appearance.
Without an objective appearance there would be no development of

9. For the meditative parts of the Upaniṣads cf. *The Thirty-two Vidyā-s*, by K. Narayanaswami Aiyar, intro. by Dr. V. Raghavan (The Adyar Library, Madras, 1962).

10. This explanation of the Samaya kind of Śaivism is based on oral information from two followers of this cult. It probably results from the identification of Śiva with the *trimūrti*, thus the creator, sustainer, and destroyer, as claimed in *Śiva-P*, *Rudrasaṃhitā*, II, 10, 35. Moreover, there is the explanation of the term *samaya* (of course, a false etymology) as *sama* (equality), *ya* (he who attains); cf. *Lalitā-Sahasranāman*, with Bhāskarārāya's commentary, tr. into English by R. Ananthakrishna Sastry (Adyar, Madras, 1951), p. 97.

inner dispositions. Hence, there proceeds a two-fold evolution, the objective appearance and the inner disposition. ”

K. C. Bhattacharyya, *Studies in Philosophy*, ‘ Causal and Non-Causal Manifestation ’, explains the first evolute from *prakṛti*, namely, *buddhi* (or, Mahat) as a bifurcation into causal dispositions (*bhāva*) and a non-causal appearing (*liṅga*), a distinction of two but felt as non-distinct as though the idea, “ It is me ”. According to his explanations, *buddha* is primarily a knowing itself while *ahaṁkāra* is primarily a willing itself as though the idea, “ It is mine ”. Both of them are a feeling itself. The third evolute, *manas*, is taken as a sense organ.¹¹ Then *SP-Sū*, III, 9, *saptadaśaikam liṅgam*, should be construed per Vijñāna Bhikṣu’s *Bhāṣya*, i. e. the ‘ subtle body ’ (*liṅga*) as one, the seventeen, namely, the eleven *indriya*-s, the five *tan-mātra* s, and *buddhi* (including *ahaṁkāra*).¹² *SP-Sū*, VI, 69 : *liṅgaśarīranimittika iti sanandanācāryaḥ*, means : “ Ācārya Sanandana claims that the subtle body (*liṅgaśarīra*) is causal ”. The two commentaries (by Aniruddha and Vijñāna Bhikṣu) appear to agree that the causality is to be in bondage, i. e. that the subtle body takes on a gross body, where the gross one, the person (*puruṣa*) owns the subtle one, the evolute (hence *prakṛti* itself), otherwise stated : the inner is in bondage to the outer, called the *svāmī* (proprietor).¹³ Also difficult is the one of *Y Sū*, Sādhana-pāda, 19 : *viśeṣāviśeṣa-liṅgamātrāliṅgāni guṇaparvāṇi*. Taking account of Vijñāna Bhikṣu’s commentary, it could be rendered : “ The partite distinct powers are the particularized, the unparticularized, only a causal indicator, not a causal indicator ”. The commentary explains the ‘ particularized ’ as space (*ākāśa*), wind, fire, water, earth; for the ‘ unparticularized ’ as the subtle elements, sound, touch, color, taste, and smell; and also explains the ‘ particularized ’ as the organs of knowledge, ear, skin, eye, tongue, and nose; the organs of action, speech, hands, feet, organ-of-excretion and organ-of-generation; mind (*manas*) which is both organ of knowledge and of action; for the ‘ unparticularized ’ which is the I-sense. ‘ Only a causal indicator ’ (*liṅgamātra*) is Mahat, the first evolute from *Prakṛti* — a kind of shoot.¹⁴ (Compare the ‘ bamboo ’ *liṅga* in the tradition of the Buddhist tantra *Guhyasamāja*).¹⁵ ‘ Not a causal indicator ’

11. *Studies in Philosophy*, by Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya, Vol. I, ed. by Gopinath Bhattacharyya (Progressive Publishers, Calcutta, 1956), Chap. IV, pp. 158-164.

12. *The Sāmkhya Philosophy*, *Sāmkhya-Pravachana Sūtram* ... tr. by Nandalal Sinha (reprint, New Delhi, 1979), pp. 284-6.

13. *The Sāmkhya Philosophy*, pp. 572-3.

14. *Yogvārttika of Vijñānabhikṣu*, Vol. II, Sādhana-pāda, text with English translation and Critical notes, by T. T. Rukmani (Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1933), pp. 106-114; for the ‘ sprout ’, p. 114.

15. Alex Wayman, *Yoga of the Guhyasamājatantra* (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1977), index, s. v. ‘ *liṅga* ’ “ emerging bamboo ” and “ that firm thing ”.

(*alīṅga*) is *prakṛti*, the equilibrium of the three distinct powers (*guṇa*).¹⁶ The remark is actually not inconsistent with *Amarakoṣa*, Nānārtha-*līṅga*, k. 73, *prakṛtir yonilīṅge ca* (pre-genetic substance as the female sex), since this lexicon's use of the term *līṅga* here is for sexual differentiation, whether female, male, or neuter. Indeed, the Sāṃkhya *prakṛti* is a cause, although called 'not a causal indicator', because a cause does not necessarily indicate, just as an idea may not be communicated and is an idea nevertheless. It does seem that Mahat, or the *buddhi* that incorporates the *ahamkāra*, is the 'subtle body' (*līṅgaśarīra*).

There are a few occurrences of the term *līṅga* in the *Nyāya-sūtra* [*N-Sū*], and many occurrences of the term in the *Vaiśeṣika-sūtra* [*Vai-Sū*]. In these texts, the term seems to mean 'indicatory mark'. For example, *N-Sū*, I, 1, 10 : *icchādvēṣaprayatnasukhaduḥkhaññānāny ātmano līṅgam*, "Desire, aversion, perseverance, pleasure, pain, and knowledge, are the indicatory mark of the soul." That is to say, we may conclude that there is indeed the soul by virtue of those mentioned as the indicatory mark. Then, *Vai-Sū* : *līṅgāc cānityaḥ śabdaḥ*, "And because of the indicatory mark, sound is impermanent". Or, *Vai-Sū*, III, 1, 19 : *pravṛtṭiniṣṛtī ca pratyagātmani dṛṣṭe pūratra līṅgam*, "And activity and inactivity, noticed in one's own self, are the indicatory marks in the case of others". That is to say, we have heard the sound die down and become inaudible — the indication of impermanence; and we notice that others behave as we do, by the indicatory marks of activity and inactivity.

Comparable to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, in Buddhism is the school of Buddhist logic. In these texts, I have decided that the best rendition of *līṅga* is 'evidence'. Dharmakīrti's *Nyāyabindu* mentions three kinds, 'non-apprehension' (*anupalabdhi*), 'self-presence' (*svabhāva*), and 'result' (*kārya*). Speaking briefly, the evidence called 'non-apprehension' means that all conditions were met for perceiving something in a place if it, e. g. a pot, were actually there, but it is not there. The one called 'self-presence' means that there is a class ('self') if there is present an entity belonging to the class e. g. "This is a tree, because it is an Aśoka". The one called 'result' is illustrated by the stock example, "Here (i. e. in that place) is a fire, because there is smoke"; where the evidence is 'smoke' — a result of the fire. The *Nyāyabindu* further explains that two (self-presence and result) prove a given thing, and one (non-apprehension) is a reason for negation (*atra dvau vastusādhanau / ekaḥ pratiśedhahetuḥ*).¹⁷

16. *Yogavārttika*, Vol. II, p. 115.

17. These materials drawn from Buddhist logic are based on my manuscript, being readied for publication, *A Millennium of Buddhist Logic*.

These illustrations of *liṅga* in the six systems of Indian philosophy, and in Buddhist logic show in general a usage of a kind of going toward. Especially, when the rendition is 'indicatory mark, or sign', there is a metaphorical approach to something; so also, when I use 'evidence' in renditions of *liṅga* in Buddhist logic.

The use of the term *liṅga* for the subtle body is a theory shared by Śaivism, the Sāṃkhya school, and Buddhism. The theory is found in the *Śiva Purāṇa*, *Srṣṭikhanda*, Chap. 12, k. 51-54 :¹⁸

liṅgaṃ dvividhaṃ proktaṃ bāhyam ābhyantaram dvijāḥ /
bāhyam sthūlaṃ samuddiṣṭaṃ sūkṣmam ābhyantaram matam // (51)

karmayajñaratā ye ca sthūlaliṅgārcane ratāḥ /
asatāṃ bhāvanārthāya sūkṣmeṇa sthūlavigrahāḥ // (52)

ādhyātmikaṃ yal liṅgaṃ pratyakṣam yasya no bhavet /
sa tal liṅge tathā sthūle kalpayec ca na cānyathā // (53)

jñānināṃ sūkṣmam amalāṃ bhāvāt pratyakṣam avyayam /
yathā sthūlam ayuktānāṃ utkrṣṭādaḥ prakalpitam // (54)

"Brahmins! The *liṅga* is of two kinds, external and internal. The external is gross; the internal is subtle. (51)

Those who are fond of ritualistic sacrifice and enjoy the worship of the gross *liṅga* do not include persons able to contemplate by way of the subtle. (Their contemplation is :) the gross body. (52)

The one who does not have direct perception of the *liṅga* that is interior, is competent in the *liṅga* which is gross, not in a different manner (i. e. that of the subtle). (53)

Among those of divine knowledge the changeless direct perception is toward the pure subtle one, just as among those who are not yogins the gross one is imagined to be excellent. (54) "

Besides, Chakroborti in the Appendix to his translation of the *Pāśupata Sūtram*, says : " The Mahābhārata shows two ways of worshipping Śiva — either by a symbol or by an image. Vyāsadeva points out to Aśvatthāmā that Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa (Nara-Nārāyaṇa) had worshipped Śiva-liṅga, whereas Aśvatthāmā worshipped Śiva's image; that is why Aśvatthāmā had to meet defeat at the

18. I use the edition of the *Śiva Mahāpurāṇa*, arranged by Nag Sharan Singh (Nag Publishers, Delhi, 1981).

hands of Kṛṣṇa-Arjuna.”¹⁹ The story represents the *līṅga* worship as superior to the image (*arcā*) worship. Chakroborti cites Nīlakaṇṭha's comment on the term *līṅga* that it means a subtle body (*sūkṣma-śarīra*), while the term *arcā* means an icon (*pratimā*).²⁰

Chakroborti refers also to the Anuśāsana-parvan (13.14.227) where Upamanyu asks Indra to see by direct perception the *līṅga* marked with the *bhaga* (*pratyakṣam iha devendru paśya līṅgaṃ bhagāṅkitam*);²¹ *bhaga* might here mean ‘sexual passion’, the erect state of the *līṅga*, or perhaps the *līṅga* with *yoni* base. The previous citation from the *Śiva Purāṇa* indicates that the ‘perception’ is of the subtle body.

As to the subtle body in the Sāṃkhya, Johnston points out on the basis of Īśvarakṛṣṇa's treatise that the term *līṅga* stands for the subtle body carrying all the personal functions of the individual except for the material elements of the mortal body.²² Thus the expression *līṅgaśarīra* of this system must mean the *līṅga* kind of body.

Buddhism has an important passage about this matter in the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, but Suzuki thoroughly mistranslated the paragraph. He evidently did not recognize that the term *līṅga* might mean ‘subtle body’ and have sexual connotations; and the text's editor apparently was troubled at this point since he left a long compound which needs to be divided up.²³ My solution is to divide it into three parts, adding two *anusvāra*-s, the first to create a neuter subject for the verb, the second to create a phrase that agrees with the subject. The paragraph with my translation follows :

viññānaṃ punar mahāmate vicitrapadaviṣayābhiniveśābhilāṣahet-
utvād viññānaṃ pravartate 'nyagatisamdhau / pṛthivībhūta-
bhautikānāṃ mahāmate kāraṇam asti mahābhūtāni na tu mahā-
bhūtānāṃ / tat kasya hetor yad uta bhāvalīṅgalakṣaṇa[ṃ] grahaṇa-
samsthāna[ṃ] kriyāyogavatāṃ mahāmate kriyāsaṃyogotpattir
bhavati nālingavatāṃ / tasmād etan mahāmate mahābhūtabhautika-
lakṣaṇaṃ tīrthakarair vikalpyate na tu mayā /

19. Haripada Chakroborti, *Pāsupata Sūtram* (Academic Publishers, Calcutta, 1970), pp. 196-7.

20. Chakroborti, p. 197.

21. Chakroborti, p. 197.

22. E. H. Johnston, *Early Sāṃkhya* (The Royal Asiatic Society, London, 1937), p. 43.

23. Cf. *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, ed. by Bunyiu Nanjio (At the Otani University Press, Kyoto, 1936), p. 324; *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra; a Mahāyāna Text*, tr. by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (George Routledge and Sons, London, 1932), p. 107.

“ [The Buddha speaks :] Besides, Mahāmati, as to the Vijñāna, due to its longings with craving for diverse planes and sense objects, Vijñāna proceeds to union with another destiny (*gati*). Mahāmati, (granted) there is a material cause belonging to earth (etc.), the earth element(s) and their derivatives, to wit, the (four) great elements; but it (i. e. Vijñāna) does not belong to the great elements. Why so? It is this way :— The character of the phenomenizing subtle body (*bhāva-liṅga*),²⁴ holding a shape, belongs to those who engage in sexual union when sexual union (actually) occurs; but does not belong to those without sexual differentiation (*liṅga*). Therefore, Mahāmati, this character of the great elements and their derivatives was imagined by the non-believers, but not by me. ”

The above passage begins with remarking that Vijñāna, third member of the Buddhist Dependent Origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*), proceeds to another destiny, the five or six (gods, men, animals, hungry ghosts, hell beings; or also, *asura*-s). Why do the Buddhists believe this? It is because of the tradition, held by all the Buddhist sects, that when the future Buddha was meditating under the Bodhi Tree, he had three clear visions (*vidyā*), one of which is always stated as the seeing with the divine eye (*divya-cakṣus*) of beings going to different destinies (*gati*). But, if one grants such a tradition, how did the Buddha see these beings to identify them as going with such-and-such a destiny? This was answered partially in the *Āśvalāyana-sūtra*, as Miss I. B. Horner translates from the equivalent Pāli scripture, the *Assalāyanasutta* in the *Majjhima-nikāya*: “ But do you sirs, know whether that *gandhabba* is a noble or brahman or worker or merchant? ” This question was preceded by the remark (her translation): “ We do know, sir, how there is conception. There is here a coitus of the parents, it is the mother's season and the *gandhabba* is present; it is on the conjunction of these three things that there is conception.”²⁵ This enables us to understand the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*'s two mentions of sexual union, the first being the sexual union itself, the second the actual union if the to-be mother is

24. The term *bhāvaliṅga* also occurs in Śaivism; cf. A. K. Ramanuja, *Speaking of Śiva* (Penguin Books, 1973), p. 170: the Śivaliṅga has three basic phases (each dividing into two), called *īṣṭaliṅga* (desire), *prāṇaliṅga* (life), and *bhāvaliṅga* (feeling or experience of the lord). The *Laṅkā*. usage of *bhāvaliṅga* as the subtle body in the process of phenomenization is not necessarily inconsistent with the Śaivite usage of the term.

25. My article, “ The Intermeditate-State Dispute in Buddhism ”, first appeared in *Buddhist Studies in Honor of I. B. Horner* (1974); as reprinted in *Buddhist Insight; Essays by Alex Wayman* (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984), cf. pp. 257–8.

receptive.²⁶ The third stipulated member is the being headed for such a rebirth, and called here *gandhabba*, S. *gandharva*. In my published study of this situation, I cited Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* (III, 13-14), beginning, "It (i. e. the intermediate-state being) has the configuration of what is to be the configuration of the future being" (the *pūrvakālabhavākṛti*).²⁷ The early Buddhist scripture, and the Buddhist Abhidharma evidently did not employ here the term *liṅga*. Notice that Buddhism, in agreement with the Sāṃkhya, does not credit the physical elements with a role in this rebirth, but of course admits that the physical elements add the gross body. Hence, the physical elements are not involved in the vision of beings departing from here and going to a different (or the same) destiny—although the *Laṅkāvatāra* points out that some persons thought the earth, etc. elements had such a role.²⁸

But as to whether the subtle body, the object of the divine, has itself sexual differentiation, is a matter of disagreement, as I know from my Buddhist Tantra researches. In particular, the tantrist, Nāro-pā disagrees with the *Hevajra-tantra*'s depiction of the *sahaḥja-kāya* (together-born body, i. e. together with the gross elements) as a union of the male ('*upāya*') and the female ('*prajñā*'). This tantrist accepts the *Kālacakra-tantra*'s position that this kind of body, in fact the subtle body, is sexless.²⁹ The Śaivite position is clearly that such a subtle body is an androgyne—male on the right and female on the left side, as is depicted in Śaivite iconography.

It is of interest that all three, Śaivism, Sāṃkhya, and Buddhism, were in their inception non-Vedic, hence not using the fire sacrifice of the deity Agni. The evidence from Buddhism suggests that from its outset it believed in the subtle body, and the *Laṅkāvatāra* suggestion is that the word *viññāna* was sometimes used for this.

Since the theory of transmigration has never been traced to the *Veda*, it appears to be the contribution of the non-Vedic movements, especially part of the

26. According to *Suvarṇavarṇāvadāna*, as studied by Sitaram Roy (K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna, 1971), p. 133, among the five characteristics of an intelligent woman, she knows 'the proper time' (for fruitfulness of the sex act), and when fertilization takes place.

27. *Buddhist Insight; Essays by Alex Wayman*, p. 257.

28. The theory here being rejected may be that credited to Vijñānabhikṣu; cf. Shiv Kumar, *Sāṃkhya Thought in the Brahmanical Systems of Indian Philosophy* (Eastern Book Linkers, Delhi, 1983), P. 59: "Vijñānabhikṣu thinks that there is an additional third kind of body called the *Adhiṣṭhāna śarīra*. It is composed of subtle form of gross elements (*sūkṣma pañcamahābhūtas*) and supports the subtle body during the time intervening between death and rebirth", with note to *bhāṣya* on *SP-Sū*, 3. 11.

29. Cf. A. Wayman, *Chanting the Names of Mañjuśrī; the Mañjuśrī Nāma-Saṃgīti*, Sanskrit and Tibetan Texts, translated and annotated (Shambala, Boston, 1985), p. 19.

theory of the subtle body. That the theory of rebirth would be called the lunar path is foreshadowed in the *Veda*; cf. *Rg-Veda*, X, 55 (trans. R. T. H. Griffith): 3. "The old hath waked the young Moon from his slumber who runs his circling course with many round him. Behold the Gods' high wisdom in its greatness: he who died yesterday to-day is living." Rebirth by way of the moon is the message of *V.Sū*, 4, 2, 19, about the "southern course of the sun" (*dakṣiṇāyana*); cf. Rāmānuja's commentary.³⁰ Now, the reborn moon is symbolized by the crescent moon, because after the occultation of the moon (normally three days), the young moon is seen first upon sundown when it is setting. Thus, this lunar path has symbolic association with dusk, or sundown. In contrast, the solar path of liberation is associated with dawn, because this is the return of the sun. The young moon is shown in iconography of Śiva who is called Candramukha ('moon-crested').

Linga and līṅgin

It is well established that Śiva is worshipped as the *liṅga*. Does this mean that Śiva is the *liṅga*? The *Śiva-P.*, Vāyavīyasamhitā, Sect. 2, Chap. 34, k. 6. poses such a question by Śrī Kṛṣṇa : *kim idaṃ liṅgam ākhyātāṃ kathāṃ līṅgī maheśvaraḥ* / "What is a *liṅga*? How is the great lord a *liṅga*-owner?" Upamanyu replies, in part :

avyaktaṃ liṅgam ākhyātāṃ triguṇaprabhavāpyayam /
anādyanantaṃ viśvasya yad upādānakāraṇam // 7 //

"The unmanifest is called *liṅga*. It is the source and the place of dissolution of the three distinct powers (*guṇa*), and the material cause of the universe with neither beginning nor end."

And also 10B, *ata eva śivo liṅgo liṅgam ājñāpayed yataḥ* / "Śiva is the *liṅga*, because he commands the *liṅga*". Then,

tayoḥ sampūjanād eva sa ca sā ca samārcitau /
na tayoḥ liṅgadehatvaṃ vidyate paramārthataḥ // 14 //

"Both the (Śiva) and (Śivā) are worshipped just by reverencing (either of) them (in terms of body). In an absolute sense, they do not have the *liṅga* as a body."

The belief appears to be that while Śiva owns the *liṅga*, and so could be called *līṅgin*, he should be worshipped as though he were the *liṅga*. The theory that

30. Of course, each commentary on *V.Sū* has to treat the topic, apparently much influenced by *Bhagavadgītā*, Chap. VIII, four verses there.

"the unmanifest is called *liṅga*" is treated in the Sāṃkhya tradition by an explanation that the *liṅga* goes to dissolution (*laya*), i. e. merges with *prakṛti*, the unmanifest form of the three distinct powers.³¹

In Buddhist logic, Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika*, Pratyakṣa chap., k. 82, exhibits the terms *liṅga* and *liṅgin* in a manner worth citing :

liṅgalingidhiyor evaṃ pāraṃparyeṇa vastuni /
pratibandhāt tadābhāsaśūnyayor apy avañcanam //

"Accordingly, by the mental association of (both) the evidence (*liṅga*) and the evidence-owner (*liṅgin*), and by the connection to the given thing (*vastu*), there is no deception through its appearance or nullity."

The trouble is that a filmy vapour over the lake at night might appear to the eye as smoke. But never fear, it is still valid to say : "Where there is smoke, there is fire", because of the mental association of smoke (the evidence) with fire (its cause, the evidence-owner).

A similar trouble arose in Śaivite worship of the *liṅga*. So K. R. Subramanian writes : "To one who has grasped the *Śivarahasya*, the Buddhist origin of the *Liṅga* comes as an amusing explanation. No doubt the Buddhist *Stūpa* is as old as the fifth century B. C. It is of the shape of the *Liṅga* and to-day two such *Stūpas* at Guntapalli and Sankaram are worshipped by the people who have mistaken them for *Liṅgas*. The *Stūpas* in the Amarāvati and Jaggayyapeta sculptures seen in the Madras Museum will be easily mistaken by anybody for *Liṅgas*."³² Of course, there are various forms of architectural *liṅga* and some of them may well approximate the form of certain Buddhist *stūpas*. So also, not all that appears as smoke is that smoke which is the evidence for fire.

But Crooke points out : "In the same way the *Linga* of Śiva resembles the tombstones raised in honour of Dravidian warriors, or the *Stūpa* or Buddhist mound, and dolmens have actually been used as Śaiva temples."³³

The Śaivite *liṅga* — is it phallic or erotic ?

There is no disagreement that there was phallic worship in India among the Indus Valley peoples, referred to contemptuously in the *Veda* as the

31. Cf. T. G. Mainkar, *Sāṃkhya Kārikā of Īśvarakṛṣṇa with Gauḍapādabhāṣya* (Oriental Book Agency, Poona, 1972), p. 69.

32. K. R. Subramanian, *The Origin of Śaivism and its History in the Tamil Land* (Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1985), p. 29.

33. William Crooke, *Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (S. Chand and Co., New Delhi, 1925), p. 182.

śiśnadeva (who have the phallus as their god). There is a well-known, frequently reproduced Indus Seal of the ithyphallic Paśupati (lord of animals) with a headdress thought to be the prototype of the Śaivite trident. Phallic worship was apparently carried on in later times by a different word, *liṅga*. To assess this situation, one should note, e. g. Basham's information, in *The Wonder That Was India*, that when the Aryan peoples invaded India and fought against the urban centers of the Indus peoples, they were in two classes, the *kṣatra* (rulers, including the priesthood) and *viś* (commoners). The commoners must have soon intermarried with the native peoples. If the ruling classes attempted to maintain their racial purity, their failure was perhaps hastened by the Mahābhārata War. Soon, every family, even those maintaining the fire sacrifice in a household hearth, would have relatives or acquaintances who were aware of or themselves practising native cults. As to those cults, while they cannot be accurately described as such, they are undoubtedly the ancestors of later cults of India. It is well to point out that phallic worship is not the same thing as eroticism, because that type of worship is not of the human penis as such, or of the human vulva as such. Rather, the sex organs became symbols of the power and mystery of creation. Therefore, it is not to deny the existence of passages, indeed their relevance for citation, that would identify the phallus with the term *liṅga*, or that some of the art representations of Śiva are similarly interpretable. But when it comes to interpreting such passages and such art representations as 'erotic', it seems to be an explanation on the lowest common denominator, along the lines of a term I have learned from my Buddhist logic researches, namely *arvāg-darśana* (the view directed hither) — the interpretation along common or vulgar lines, lacking sensitivity for symbolic values or for subtle metaphorical nuances. However, it should be admitted that this *arvāg-darśana* is also necessary for all of us to get along in the world; and that the other world is inaccessible for our normal senses.

Returning to that ancient phallic worship, while the 'high' religion condemned it it presumably continued unabated in the villages. This situation continued for some centuries as the priesthood finished composing the Vedic hymns, the ritualistic Brāhmaṇas, and the older Upaniṣads.

Then a new situation arose of movements directly opposed to the Brahmanical systems. Among these opponents well-known are the Buddhists and the Jains; and undoubtedly there were other groups that have since disappeared. Their growing power in terms of proselyting success must have been a great worry to the Brahmanical establishment, meaning the priesthood and 'elder statesmen' among it. The priests responsible for preserving the Vedic lore, including the fire sacrifice, sought to expand their base among the people. They naturally looked to certain movements which were admittedly non-Vedic, but also not anti-Vedic.

The widespread worship of a deity Śiva and a philosophical system the Sāṃkhya were of this category, non-Vedic, but not anti-Vedic. Certain Brahmanical priests tried to enlist such movements, for a mutual advantage — the non-Vedic movements would be promoted in status in the direction of the 'high' religion, while the Brahmanical tradition would be saved.³⁴ It did not work out as planned, because in the process, Brahmanism was transformed into Hinduism; and while elevating the native cults, became invaded by them. As Śaivism advanced in standing, it absorbed the *yakṣa* cult and much of the *nāga* cult. This advance was not without its challenges and antagonistic responses, because the followers of the 'high' religions of Vaishnavism and Buddhism must have been early and later adversaries.

Various native cults also were transformed by being elevated in status, and became more philosophical. Then it was possible to rationalize certain beliefs, formerly condemned, with what might be called 'spiritual' interpretations. That is why today one will read in various works by Indians on Śaivism a denial that the *liṅga* is the phallus;³⁵ and the late Dr. Basham once told the present writer that in all the years of his India contacts he never found any Śaivite admitting that the *liṅga* is the phallus.

The foregoing considerations have great importance for the history of Indian religion. Without doubt one must accept the older dating for Gautama Buddha, and reject certain modern attempts to place the Buddha in time closer to the Maurya Dynasty. One must place the Buddha prior to the composition of the *Śvetāśvatara-Upaniṣad* (*ŚU*), because this earliest of the Śaivite Upaniṣads reveals the initial promotion toward a 'high' religion — only possible after Brahmanism was threatened with being overwhelmed by the anti-Vedic movements.³⁶ Dandekar is certainly right in his textual placement: "The *ŚU* may accordingly be assigned to about the end of the 5th century B. C. Conceptually,

34. B. Bhattacharya *Śaivism and the Phallic World*, Vol. One (Oxford and IBH Publishing Co., New Delhi, 1975), p. 216, regards these certain Brahmanical priests as 'schismic' (*sic.* for 'schismatic'): "We see here a continuous process of struggle between the Vedic civilisation; and (a) an alien (the Dasyu) civilisation; and (b) an Asura (or Rākṣasa) civilisation that posed great threat to Yajña. One of these was non-Aryan; the other appears to be a schismic protestant break-away section of the Aryans. We notice Rudras being transformed into the later Śivas against the background of the struggles."

35. Among the many passages or works that could be cited, suffice it to mention the booklet by Swami Saukarananda, *Is Śiva-liṅga a Phallus?* (Nilmoni Maharaj, Calcutta, 1957). This booklet, and the work by B. Bhattacharya (n. 34, above), treat phallic cults of other countries to arrive at a conclusion that the India situation is different.

36. The dating of the Buddha prior to the *ŚU*, likewise Mahāvira, is consistent with the 'long' chronology usually given in books of Indian history, namely that presented

(Continued on the next page)

the *ŚU* may be placed between the *Kaṭha-Up.* and the *Bhagavadgītā*.³⁷ At this time, as Dandekar points out, Śiva was identified with the Vedic Rudra.

As was mentioned above, it is a misuse of the term 'erotic' to apply it to the Śaivite worship of Śiva as the *līṅga*. Even the Khajurāho art, while rightly called 'erotic' for its themes, is probably a failure in terms of arousing erotic feelings in the on-lookers, who have been conditioned in terms of eroticism to get it by looking downward rather than up — since most of the Khajurāho art is up, and the 'erotic' pictures derived therefrom were usually with telescopic lenses.

Even though O'Flaherty says, "Śiva is Kāma, but he is more as well, and it is this 'more' that opposes Kāma,"³⁸ the most famous of Indian lexicons, the *Amarakoṣa*, places Kāmadeva in the section devoted to Viṣṇu, not in the section devoted to Śiva. And this is right, because in Indian tradition Viṣṇu is the preserver; racial preservation is through sexual union; but preservation is also of the learned tradition, the sacred lore. Indeed, it is the Vaiṣṇava tradition which indeed has the erotic, particularly in the later Kṛṣṇa mythology. When in a celebrated story Kṛṣṇa steals the clothes of the Gopī ladies who were bathing, and informs them from his position in a tree, looking down on them, that he will return the clothes if the ladies come to him with their hands above their heads — this is certainly erotic, because believable in realistic terms. Granted that the spiritual interpretation is immediately given that the ladies are the human souls

(Continued from the last page)

by W. Geiger, tr. *The Mahāvamsa* (Colombo, 1950), Introduction. This dating is c 560–490 B. C. Recently, some scholars have supported the 'short' chronology. These are especially, P. H. L. Eggermont, "New notes on Asoka and his Successors, IV," *Persica* (a Netherlands publication of the Société Néerlandaise de l'Inde), No. VIII, 1979, pp. 55–93; Heinz Bechert, "The Date of the Buddha Reconsidered," *Indologica Taurinensia*, Vol. X, 1982, pp. 29–26; Heinz Bechert, "A Remark on the problem of the Date of Mahāvira," *Indologica Taurinensia*, Vol. XI, 1983, pp. 288–290; Ryusho Hikata, "On the Period of the Life-time of Sākyamuni," *Studies in Buddhism and Buddhist Culture*, Naritasan Shinshoji (Japan), 1985, pp. 3–20. The difference in dating has to do with rival accounts of the Buddha's Nirvāṇa date in relation to the enthronement of Aśoka. Bechert and Eggermont appear to agree in supporting a dating of the Nirvāṇa about 100 years before the Aśoka kingship. Hikata puts it from 50 to 100 years before Candragupta kingship. I supported the long chronology in a paper, "Aśoka and Upagupta-Moggaliputta," *K. P. Jayaswal Commemoration Volume* (K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna, 1981), pp. 300–7.

37. R. N. Dandekar, in *Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar as an Indologist* (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1976), p. 73.

38. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1973), p. 171.

which should surrender to the Lord with no adventitious additions (the 'clothes').³⁹

Dange, referring to Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal* about the God 'Lingal' of the Gonds, mentions a yearly ceremony called the Waterfestival day commemorating the birth of the dead Lingal. Dange was so certain by dint of the usual identification of *liṅga* with phallus that he wrote "Phallus = Linga = Śiva". A boy called Lingal goes about the streets where women worship him, wash his feet with water and pour much water on his head, thus restoring him to life.⁴⁰ It is suggested that this is a fertility ritual. It should more precisely be called a 'prosperity' rite, according to a somewhat parallel ritual that was traditionally practised in Tibet. One may refer to the article by R. A. Stein on the *liṅga* in the Lamaist masked dances and the theory of the soul, written in French for the *Liebethal Festschrift* (Visvabharati, 1957). The word *liṅga* is transcribed phonetically, and while derived from the languages of India does not have here the well-known sense of 'phallus'. In addition to Stein's information there is available the posthumously produced *Tibetan Religious Dances; Text and Translation of the 'Chams yig* of René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (The Hague, 1976), with many references to the ritual. The term *liṅga* here refers to an effigy usually made of black dough (but could also be drawn on paper), fashioned like a human (or demonic), with visible male or female sexual sign. The evil forces are imagined to be concentrated in this effigy — if in paper to be 'killed' by burning; if in dough to be 'killed' by stabbing with the magic 'nail' (T. *phur bu*; S. *kīla*), to be considered the 'killing' of the *liṅga*. Subsequently, the 'corpse' is "turned into earthly goods and treasures", in particular into 'food, offered to the gods and holy personages in a 'supernatural banquet' (Wojkowitz, p. 103). Thus, there is a ritual 'killing' and dismemberment, followed by a ritual revival with imagined (hopefully, material) prosperity. Even the washing part of the Lingal ceremony is consistent with the Gaṅgā stream from Śiva's head. In the case of dough-effigy stabbing, Stein

39. There are many depictions of Kṛṣṇa's theft of the cow-herd girls' clothes. For painting versions, e.g., *Folk Paintings of India*, foreword by Verrier Elwin (Inter-National Cultural Center, New Delhi, 1961), p. 17, Vastraharana; Krishna Chaitanya, *A History of Indian Painting: Pahari Traditions* (Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1984), colored plate VII. A sculptural representation is depicted in Shakti M. Gupta, *Vishnu and his incarnations* (Somaiya Publications, Bombay, 1971), "Krishna steals the clothes of the Gopies: Varadaraja Temple, Kanchipuram, 16th century A. D." Presumably those are made by male artists, because when the women painters of Mithila painted the scene, they leave the clothes on the Gopies; cf. Yves Vequaud, *L'art du Mithila* (Les Presses de la Connaissance, Paris, 1976), p. 55.

40. S. A. Dange, *Legends in the Mahābhārata* (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1969) pp. 228-9.

(pp. 204-5) mentions that with destruction of body the soul (Tib. *rnam ses* = Skt. *viñāna*) is liberated. Wojkowitz remarks (p. 106), " According to an eye witness, the *liṅga* has about one-quarter of a man's size. The Tibetan sources consulted did not give an exact measure, but we may expect that the *liṅga* — like the dough effigy used as a substitute offering (*glud*) in the 'scapegoat' ceremonies — has the length of an arrow." The ritual is not completely Tibetan, since I found a reference to this destruction of demons in the *liṅga*, imaginatively by incantation (*dhāranī*) or by stabbing the *liṅga*, in a brief tantric work in the Tibetan Tanjur (Derge *Rgyud 'grel*, Thu, f. 326b-7) by Suramgamavajra, the *Sarvatathāgatoṣṇīṣodbhūtasitātapatrā-nāma-vṛtti*; hence, the essentials of the ritual are in texts translated from Sanskrit, while the ritual was elaborated in Tibet.

So, to the question posed, " Is the Saivite *liṅga* phallic or erotic ? " we can respond that the *liṅga* is sometimes phallic, sometimes not; and probably not erotic.

The *liṅga* and prosperity through death

For Rudra with his bow, one may consult Sivaramamurti, '*Satarudriya*'.⁴¹ And this helps us to interpret some mantra-verses of the *Rg-veda* (X, 18), the Funeral Hymn. These verses and their symbolism are probably the prototype of all the later forms of symbolic death and revival for prosperity of one type or another, as we have already seen with the boy called Lingal. The verses 7-12 of the Vedic hymn are in two sets of three, hence probably two *ṛk*-s.

इमा नारीरविध्रुवाः सुपत्नीराजनेन सर्पिषा सं विशन्तु ।
 अनुश्रवोऽनमीवाः सुरतना आ रोहंतु जनयो योनिमग्ने ॥ ७ ॥
 उदीर्ष्व नार्यभि जीवलोकं गतासुमेतमुपं शेष एहि ।
 हस्तग्राभस्य दिधिषोस्तवेदं पत्युर्जनित्वमभि सं बभूथ ॥ ८ ॥
 धनुर्हस्तादाददानो मृतस्यास्मे क्षत्राय वर्चसे बलाय ।
 अत्रैव त्वमिह वयं सुवीरा विश्वाः स्पृधो अभिमातीर्जयेम ॥ ९ ॥
 उपं सर्पं मातरं भूमिमेतामुरुग्यचंसं पृथिवीं सुशेवाम् ।
 ऊर्णम्रदा युवतिर्दक्षिणावत एषा त्वां पातु निर्रतेरुपस्थात् ॥ १० ॥ २७ ॥
 उच्छृञ्चस्व पृथिवि मा नि बाधथाः सूपायनास्मै भव सूपवञ्चना ।
 माता पुत्रं यथा सिचाभ्येनं भूम ऊर्णहि ॥ ११ ॥

41. C. Sivaramamurti, *Satarudriya : Vibhūti of Śiva's Iconography* (Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1276), p. 15.
 RGB...5

उच्छृङ्खमाना पृथिवी सु तिष्ठतु सहस्रं मित उप हि श्रयन्ताम् ।
ते गृहासौ घृतश्रुतौ भवन्तु विश्वाहास्मै शरणाः सन्त्वत्र ॥ १२ ॥

7. These women, not widows, but having good husbands, must make their appearance along with an anointing that is clarified butter. Without tears, without sickness, having goodly jewels, the women must first climb upon the *yonī*.

8. Now bestir yourself, O wife, toward the world of the living. You lie by this deceased (whose *asu* is gone). Come hither! You have entered into wifehood of a husband who is grasping your hands, and now your suitor.

9. Taking the bow from the hand of the corpse, for power, for vitality, for strength, for us — you are just there. May we (here) who have good heroes, conquer all foes and plotters.

10. Slide unto this mother earth, unto the broad and very kindly earth. A maiden who has the softness of wool, for him who is pious, must protect you from the lap of destruction.

11. Open up, O earth. Do not press him hard. Be for him easy of access, and passage. As a mother, her son with a robe, so cover him, O earth!

12. Opening itself up, the earth must stand firm, for a thousand posts must buttress themselves! These mansions must be dripping with fatness. They must forever be for him a refuge there!

Notice that these women, probably one by one, have been anointed with clarified butter; are 'without sickness' hence also not in their monthly courses; wear jewels to guard against the evil eye, in case their clothing is scanty or lacking; climb upon the *yonī*, i. e. the burial mound. Temporarily she is not the wife of her husband in the world of the living. Why so? The deceased is referred to as male, but women also die — so whether it be a man or woman that died, they must all be counted as male, to subsequently slide into the female earth. 'Taking the bow from the hand of the corpse' means disarming it, removing its possible evil toward the living; hence the corpse is Rudra. Thus this woman has a role to produce a subsequent prosperity. How does she do it? According to suggestion of the Vedic hymn, she lies there, probably on top of the corpse. This amounts to 'copulating' with the corpse. Hence, O 'Flaherty must be right: that while Śiva is lying lifeless, his 'phallus' is still alive.⁴²

42. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, "Śiva Erect and Supine," in *Discourses on Śiva*, ed. by Michael W. Meister (Vakils, Fester & Simons, Bombay, 1984), p. 293.

The 'phallus' is the corpse itself, because it is what then slides into the earth, as into the female organ — the *yonī*. Thus, the broad earth that opens up for the deceased, is the shameless and headless woman with her legs apart.

And I have previously cited in a publication a passage translated from a Tibetan tantric work : " Because one experiences the Dharmakāya, joyful, equal to the sky, for only an instant at the time of (1) death, (2) faint, (3) going to sleep, (4) yawning, and (5) coitus. "43 The word 'yawning' probably can also be interpreted as the opening up of the earth, so also of the woman. And I associated this experience with the Divine Doors of evening.

So also, the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, V. 2 :

yo yoniṃ yonim adhiṣṭhaty eko
 viśvāni rūpāni yonīś ca sarvāḥ /
 rṣiṃ prasūtaṃ kapilaṃ yas tam agre
 jñānair bibharti jāyamānaṃ ca paśyati //

" He, who being one, rules over every single *yonī* (burial mound, or, female organ), over all forms (or, colors, such as the three of the *guṇa*-s) and over all sources (*yonī*), namely, he who supports with his cognitions and beholds the seer who was engendered in the beginning as Kapila (i. e. the god of the golden egg, Brahmā). "

Thus, this Lord is every corpse44 that slid into the earth, so also every phallus that filled up a woman's vaginal channel. And this Lord was there at the beginning, when Brahmā emerged from the Golden Egg; knowing how it came to be.45

The foregoing is stated in generality. But there is the special case of the yogin who follows the precept for attaining liberation (*mokṣa*). And it is this case — I now suggest — that is responsible for the curious and striking pictures of the goddess Kālī trampling upon the dead Śiva, or upon the copulating couple (the woman on top, as we noticed above as the implication of the Funeral Hymn). This is because Kālī holds a severed head (and sometimes the

43. Alex Wayman, *The Buddhist Tantras; Light on Indo-Tibetan Esotericism* (Samuel Weiser, New York, 1973), p. 215.

44. Rudra is not the only divinity corpse, according to *Lalitā-Sahasranāman* (n. 10, above), p. 142, where the goddess is called " seated on the seat (formed) of five corpses " (*pañcapretāsanāsini*), with the comment that the five corpses are Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Īśvara, and Sadāśiva, who are lifeless without Śakti.

45. Cf. *Hymn of Creation* (*Nāsadiya Sūkta*, *Rg-Veda* X, 129), by Vasudeva S. Agrawala (Prithivi Prakashan, Varanasi, 1963), pp. 26-27, on Mantras VI and VII.

depictions of the scene show other severed heads on the cremation).⁴⁶ I appeal to the *Bhagavadgītā*, VIII, 12-13 :

sarvadvārāṇi samyamya mano hr̥di nirudhya ca /
mūrdhny ādhāyātmanaḥ prāṇam āsthito yogadhāraṇām //
om ity ekākṣaram brahma vyāharan mām anusmaran /
yaḥ prayāti tyajan dehaṁ sa yāti paramām gatim //

“Whoever, restraining all the orifices (of the body), and confining the *manas* in the heart, while fixing his life force in the head, is dwelling in yogic concentration. (And) muttering (to himself) the monosyllable ‘OM’, (thus) remembering me, the *brahman*, as he departs, giving up his body, he reaches the supreme goal.”⁴⁷

That is to say, this yogin, keeping all his consciousness and forces within by restraining the orifices, confining the *manas* (also called the *viññāna*) in the heart which is the place of death (in Śaivism under control of Śiva), while fixing his life force (in the Funeral Hymn, the *asu*) in the head (so in Śaivism under control of goddess, the Śakti), could reach the supreme goal by bearing in mind the *brahman* as he departs. That is, holding the severed head is a sign that the head thus retaining the life force (in the case of this yogin) is in the domain of the goddess.⁴⁸ And *Śiva-P.*: Vāyavīyasamhitā, Sect. 2, Chap. 35, k. 22 “The head (*mūrdhan*) of the *liṅga* (is) the best among the parts (*bhāga*) [*infra*; three in number] of *nāda* (‘sound’) [= Śiva; cf. *Śiva-P.*, Vidyēśvara-samhitā, Chap. 16, k. 87]”. This *nāda* is usually explained as OM, the three, according to both *Liṅga-P.*, I, 17, k. 62, and *Śiva-P.*, Vāyavīyasamhitā, Sect. 2, Chap. 35, k. 46, A = Brahmā, U = Viṣṇu, M = Śiva.

46. In fact, the depictions show (a) Kālī trodding the lifeless Śiva, while she holds a severed head and there are other heads on the ground; or (b) the goddess Chinnamastā holding her own severed head, which drinks her blood, as do two female attendants, while the goddess trods the copulating couple. See *Bhāratiya Pratika-vidyā*, by Janārdana Miśra (Patnā, 1959), Pls. 67, 73, 74.

47. I follow the interpretation of *The Gītābhāṣya of Rāmānuja*, tr. into English by M. R. Sampatkumaran (Ananthacharya Indological Research Institute, Bombay, 1985), pp. 209-10.

48. This is not to deny that there are examples cited, whether or not true, of disciples offering their own heads to the goddess; or that there are profane practices of devotees offering heads severed from corpses to the goddess or to a *liṅga*. My remark intends that whatever a deity holds in hand constitutes an emblem of the deity, as in this case the head. Emerson in his essay “The Great Man” wrote: “Nature ... scatters nations of naked [American] Indians and nations of clothed Christians, with two or three good heads among them.”

It might be added that the Funeral Hymn is not the only passage of the *Rg-Veda* where—as was above suggested—a body is upon a corpse, because this is also the situation in *Rg-Veda*, I, 32, Indra Slays the Dragon, the *mantras* 7-9 :

अपादहस्तो अपृतन्यदिन्द्रमास्य वज्रमधि सानौ जघान ।
वृष्णो वधिः प्रतिमानं बुभूषन्पुरुत्रा वृत्रो अशयद्वस्तः ॥ ७ ॥
नदं न भिन्नममुया शयानं मनो रुहाणा अति यन्त्यापः ।
याश्चिद्वृत्रो महिना पर्यतिष्ठत्तासामहिः पत्सुतः शीर्षभूव ॥ ८ ॥
नीचावया अभवद्वृत्रपुत्रेन्द्रो अस्या अव वधैर्जभार ।
उत्तरा सूरधरः पुत्र आसीदानुः शये सद्वत्सा न श्रेनुः ॥ ९ ॥

7. Without foot, without hand, he had attacked Indra. Indra had struck a thunderbolt upon his back. Emasculated, Vṛtra, desiring to be a match of the virile man, lay tossed about to various places.

8. Over him who, crushed like a reed, is so lying, go the waters of Manu increasing. Whatever (waters) Vṛtra had encompassed with his might, lying at their feet was the dragon.

9. The mother of Vṛtra became one of low strength. Indra bore on (i. e. stabbed) her with the death-weapon. Above was the mother, below the son. Dānu lies still like the cow with her calf.

The role of Vṛtra's mother in thus lying upon him is suggested by the *mantras* 13B-14, as I render them : “ And at the time when Indra and the dragon fought, as well as in future days, Indra was victorious. What avenger of Ahi did you see, O Indra, when in your heart, after having slain (him), fear did come; when you crossed the nine and ninety streams, like a frightened hawk, the skies? ” The implication is that Vṛtra's mother, by lying upon her slain son, re-assembled and revived him; or that each piece of the scattered Vṛtra gave rise to its own demon; and that this is what frightened Indra.

The Iconic and *Linga* representations

The following information from the *Mayamata* should suggest why it is difficult to interpret Śaivite legends when it is insisted that there are three ways to represent Śiva. The translation by Dagens states : “ It is said that there are three sorts of representation of the god, symbolic, iconic and mixed. Those which are symbolic (*niṣkala*) are called *Linga*; the iconic (*sakala*) are called image; the *Mukhalinga* is a combination of these two and is similar to the *Linga* as to shape and height.”⁴⁹ So also, *Sakalādhikāra* of Sage Agastya, I, 1a,

49. *Mayamata* (n. 4, above), p. 307.

states that the embodiment (*vapus*) of the Supreme Being is of three kinds, the *sakala* (image), the *niṣkala* (symbolic), and the *miśra* (mixed).⁵⁰ The text *Sakalādhikāra* describes the icons (or 'images'); and the text *Mayamata* proceeds to describe the symbolic representations called *liṅga*. Previously, the latter work was cited for the 'male', 'female' and 'neuter' stones. According to the information in Dagens' translation, the 'male' one can be used for making an iconic, symbolic or mixed representation; the 'female' one for making the image of a female deity or a pedestal; the 'neuter' one to make 'Brahmā's stone' and 'Kūrma's stone', also the '*nandyāvarta* stone' (all of which, as Dagens points out from the *Mayamata*'s later information, are the liners on which rest the pedestal and the bottom of the *Liṅga*).⁵¹ Such information complicates the interpretation of Śaivite art and its correlation with the legends.

Several *liṅgas* are much discussed by art historians. Preeminent is the Guḍimallam *Liṅga*, named for a village in Andhra Pradesh where it is located. v. Mitterwallner argues for 1st cent. B. C., and she accepts this *Liṅga* as the first stage in its evolution. Her second stage is circa First to Fourth Centuries A. D. based on *Liṅgas* at Mathurā and nearby sites; third stage, Fourth/Fifth centuries, A. D., with No. India types. Her fourth stage, circa Fifth Century, A. D. to the end of the 'Medieval Epoque' presents the kind of *Liṅga* which is treated below in terms of its three parts. She points out that the extant Sanskrit iconographic passages refer just to this kind of *Liṅga*. She states that only from the First Century, A. D. is there an altar (*pīṭha*)—which is useful for the *Liṅga*'s lustration.⁵² I suppose this is another argument for her placement of the Guḍimallam *Liṅga* in the First Century B. C.

Now, when the iconic Śiva is represented as issuing from the symbolic *liṅga*, called the *Liṅgodbhava-mūrti* (which is the implication of the Guḍimallam *Liṅga*) this not only differentiates the iconic from the symbolic form, but also distinguishes Śiva from the *liṅga* in its meaning of sexual differentiation, a distinction claimed by one of Śiva's names, i. e. Atīndriya (who surpasses, or is beyond the *indriya*-s),⁵³ since the *buddhīndriya*-s are the sense organs, and the *karmendriya* s are the organs of action, including the generative organs.

As to the three-part symbolic *liṅga*, the *Mānasāra Śilpāśāstra*, according to the translator, does not deviate from the general appearance: "The *mūla* or

50. *Sakalādhikāra of Sage Agastya*, ed., etc., by V. Gopal Iyengar (The Tanjore Maharaja Serfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library, Thanjavur, 1973), I, 1, p. 1.

51. *Mayamata*, p. 308.

52. Gritli V. Mitterwallner, "Evolution of the *Liṅga*", in *Discourses on Śiva* (n. 42 above), pp. 18-22.

53. *Liṅga-P.*, I, Chap. 98 'Thousand Names of Śiva', no. 347.

the lower part, technically called *Brahma-bhāga*, says our author, is square, whereas the middle part, called *Vishnu-bhāga* is octagonal, and the upper part, called *Śiva-bhāga*, is round".⁵⁴ The *Līṅga Purāṇa*, II, 11, 31-33, helps to explain that form :

pīṭhākṛtir umā devī līṅgarūpaś ca śaṃkaraḥ /
 pratiṣṭhāpya prayatnena pūjayanti surāsurāḥ //
 ye ye padārthā līṅgāṅkās te te śarvavibhūṭayaḥ /
 arthā bhagāṅkitā ye ye te te gauryā vibhūṭayaḥ //
 svargapātāla-lokānta-brahmāṇḍāvaraṇāṣṭakam /
 jñeyam sarvam umārūpaṃ jñātā devo mahesvaraḥ //

31. Goddess Umā has the configuration of the pedestal. Śiva has the form of the *līṅga*. Upon installing them assiduously, the Gods and Asuras worship them.

32. Whatever material objects have the mark of *līṅga*, they all are the superhuman powers of the Lord. Whatever external things are marked with the *bhaga*, they all are the superhuman powers of Umā.

33. There are eight coverings of the Brahmā-egg whose extremities are the sky and the earth. All their knowable is the form of Umā, and the knower is the lord Mahesvara.

We may therefore conclude that the square form of the lower part is what rests upon the earth pedestal; that the octagonal form of the middle part represents the intermediate realm, the *antarikṣa*; and that the rounded upper part goes with the sky.

The rounded upper part of the *līṅga* being in the sky, this makes us wonder if it implicates the 'golden bowl' of the *Īśa Upaniṣad*. Notice first *Rg-Veda*, I, 32, Indra slays the Dragon, the verse 11, containing : *apāṃ bilam api hitam yad āsid vṛtram jaghanvān apa tad vavāra* (" The cleft of the water which had been closed up, that he disclosed after slaying Vṛtra "). This suggests how to translate the Upaniṣadic passage :

hiraṇmayena pātreṇa satyasyāpihitaṃ mukham /
 tat tvaṃ pūṣaṃ apāvṛṇu satyadharmāya dṛṣṭaye //

54. Prasanna Kumar Acharya, *Indian Architecture according to Mānasāra-Śilpa-tātra* (Manasara Series, Vol. II) (Reprint, New Delhi, 1981), p. 73.

“The face of truth is enclosed with a golden bowl. Disclose it, O Pūṣan,⁵⁵ so that I, who have truth as *dharma* may see it.”

Thus, the ‘golden bowl’ in the Śaivite sense, may be interpreted as the rounded ‘Śiva-bhāga’ of the upright *liṅga*, previously referred to as its ‘head’.

As to the eight coverings of the Brahmā-egg, the first seven are standard : earth, water, fire, and wind ; space ; sun and moon ; and the eighth is variously stated as *dīkṣita*, *brāhmaṇa*, *yajamāna*.⁵⁶ Besides, since the Brahmā-egg here occupies the intermediate space, it may be pertinent that the eight auspicious symbols (*aṣṭamaṅgala*) are located there according to Jain and Buddhist depictions, and that the number eight is especially associated with women.⁵⁷ Since the middle part of the *liṅga* is called *Vishnu-bhāga*, we note that Viṣṇu as the preserver is especially involved with women, as Viṣṇu’s Krishna form confirms. The square bottom of the *liṅga* being called the *Brahma-bhāga* is consistent with architectural canons which assign a central altar for Brahmā in a square building.⁵⁸ *Agni-P.*, I, 54, 33–4, gives human body correspondences.⁵⁹

55. For Pūṣan, cf. R. N. Dandekar, “Pūṣan, the Pastoral God,” reprinted in *Vedic Mythological Tracts* (Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1979), esp. p. 117. Pūṣan is here the Psychopomp, who guides the dead over the dangerous part of the solar route to the Satyaloka. The fact that Pūṣan is toothless shows that he is not in the human class: cf. Puruṣa-sūkta, *R̥g-Veda*, where the horse establishes the class of mammals that have two sets of teeth. Therefore, Pūṣan must be the ‘non-human’ (*amānava*) of the *Chāndogya-Up.*, IV, 15, 5 & 6, who leads the deceased to *Brahman*. As to the dangerous route, the *Satapatha-Br.* (XI, 2, 3) refers obscurely to two kinds of *nāma-rūpa* (later *avyakta* and *vyakta*) calling them “two great monsters (*abha*) of the Brahman” (*te haite brahmaṇo mahatī abhve*), namely, the two great *yakṣa*-s (appearances, tempting and threatening) of the Brahman (*te haite brahmaṇo mahatī yakṣe*). These two might be mythologically characterized as the shapely (river-like) Yakṣi — a tree spirit, and the malevolent dwarf Yakṣa; cf. Ram Nath Misra, *Yakṣa Cult and Iconography* (Delhi, 1981), e. g. Pls. 68 and 58, respectively.

56. Cf. Vasudeva S. Agrawala, *Matsya Purāṇa — A Study* (All-India Kashiraj Trust, Ramnagar, Varanasi, 1963), pp. 248–252, calls these the eight *Vasu*-s, and points to Kālidāsa’s *Śakuntala*, I, 1 (initial verse) for the eight. For the eighth one, where Kālidāsa has *yā ca hotrī*, Agrawala takes this as *Manas*. These are also the eight forms of Śiva : Śarva — earth; Bhava — water; Rudra — fire; Ugra — wind; Bhīma — space (*ākāśa*); Mahādeva — Moon; Īśāna — Sun; Paśupati — *yajamāna*.

57. Cf. Alex Wayman, “The Mathurā set of Aṣṭamaṅgala in early and later times,” in *The Cultural History of Ancient Mathurā; Seminar Proceedings* (American Institute of Indian Studies, New Delhi, 1986).

58. Cf. Lalit Kumar Shukla, *A Study of Hindu Art and Architecture* (Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi, 1972), p. 112 : *Brahmapīṭha* : “The square (Brahmā in centre)”.

59. Cf. *Agnipurāṇam* (Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series): padāj jānvantako brahmā nābhyaṁto viṣṇur ity atāḥ / mūrdhānto bhūtabhāgeṣo ... “From the foot to the knee is Brahmā. (From that) to the navel is Viṣṇu. (From the latter) to the head is the part of creatures, the lord (*Īśa*)”. Viṣṇu is allotted the sexual portion.

This seems the proper place to explain the term *ūrdhva-retas* of Śaivite literature. According to *Liṅga-P.*, I, Chap. 17, k. 62-63, Brahmā is the seed, Viṣṇu the womb, and Rudra (= Śiva) the sower. The term *ūrdhva-retas* does not signify a *retas* (seed) up at the 'head' of the *liṅga*. Instead, the 'head' as the 'sower' must cause the seed to rise to the 'womb' which is the Viṣṇu part. Consistently, Agrawal, *The Thousand Syllabled*, states that " *Ūrdhva* is the same as the *Nābhi* (the Centre) ".⁶⁰ Here, being 'upward' (*ūrdhva*) means the middle, as the U of the A-U-M. Of course, *ūrdhva-retas* as a feature of Śiva is known to not issue seed, and the reason can now be seen that in this symbolism the seed does not rise to the 'head' of the *liṅga* where it would be in a position to issue (in ordinary human conceptions of when it issues).

Varieties of *Liṅga*

There are many types of symbolic *liṅga*-s stated in texts, and various secondary works have listed them. Karmarkar's list is quite satisfactory. *Liṅga*s differ by the materials used to make them, or by the legend of their arising somewhere, or by their shapes including mouldings and the number of Śiva-faces (in the case of the Mukhaliṅga-s), or by the kind of shrine to which they belong, or by their function.⁶¹

There are certain celebrated ones with many sub-varieties, such as the *jyotir-liṅga*-s, which might stem from Śiva's identification with Rudra who in Vedic literature partially overlaps the fire-god Agni's functions. There is also an implication of this kind of *liṅga* as a deliberate attempt to divorce the *liṅga* from phallic associations, since a pillar of fire does not permit the situation of the phallus as touchable, i. e. its contacting the soft — as was already pointed out.

The *bāṇa-liṅga*-s are stones that are worshipped by the Śaivites, much as the Śālagrāmas are worshipped by the Vaiṣṇavas.⁶²

Karmarkar is probably right to include under *cala* varieties the *Śailaja-liṅga*-s (stone) which are worn by the Jāṅgamas, Liṅgavants or Liṅgāyats.⁶³

60. Vasudeva S. Agrawala, *The Thousand-Syllabled Speech* (publ. by author, Varanasi, 1963), p. 49.

61. A. P. Karmarkar (n. 5, above), pp. 89-91.

62. P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, Vol. II, Part II (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1974), p. 737, informs that Bāṇa was an Asura devotee of Śiva, and established the practice using ' *bāṇa-liṅga*-s '—white stones found mainly in the Narmadā river. Swami Tattwananda, *Vaiṣṇava Sects, Śaiva Sects, Mother Worship* (Firma KLM, Calcutta, 1984), p. 69, cites from *Viramītrodaya* eight kinds of them.

63. Karmarkar, p. 89.

The *Sakalādhikāra* describes the *līṅga* as of two kinds : *acala* (fixed, because permanently installed in the 'womb-house', *garbha-gṛha*), and *cala* (movable, because taken in procession during festivals).⁶⁴ And *Śiva-Purāṇa*, *Vidyēśvarasaṃhitā*, Chap. 19, k. 30-31, explains :

akhaṇḍaṃ tu caraṃ līṅgaṃ dvikhaṇḍam acaraṃ smṛtam /
khaṇḍākhaṇḍa-vicāro 'yaṃ sacarācaryoḥ smṛtaḥ //
vedikā tu mahāvidyā līṅgaṃ devo maheśvaraḥ /
ato hi sthāvare līṅge smṛtā śreṣṭhādikhaṇḍitā //

"A mobile *līṅga* should be a single whole; stationary ones should be in two sections. This is the rule about sectioned and unsectioned *līṅga*-s, (respectively) stationary or mobile. The altar (= pedestal) is the *mahāvidyā* (the great opponent of *avidyā*); the *līṅga* is a god, the great lord (= Śiva). Hence, in a stationary *līṅga*, a sectioning into the best (the lord) and the *ādi* (the goddess) is stipulated."

This term *ādi* (the first) is consistent with Karmarkar's insistence, following a theory advanced by D. R. Bhandarkar, that Śiva's epithet Tryambaka, which later was understood as 'three-eyed', originally meant 'having three mothers'.⁶⁵ In later Śaivism, Śiva is associated with goddesses as consorts. The theory of having the goddess first (*ādi*) suggests the mythology of having life before death, which is basic to the theory of re-birth; while the theory advanced by the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* that death came first (and was hungry) suggests the mythology of re-death (*punar mṛtyu*).

As to the actual sectioning into two of the stationary representations, this is found in the *garbha-gṛha* (womb-house) of various temples. The pedestal is a stylized form of the female vulva, but while the *līṅga* is also a stylized form of the male penis, it is the base of this *līṅga* which is upon the pedestal; and so it is not an imitation of sexual union, for which it is necessary to have the end (i. e. top) of the male phallus enter the female organ. There are illustrations of this combination of pedestal and *līṅga* in Vatsyayan's *The Square and the Circle*, Figs. 29, 33, 34, and 35.⁶⁶ Indeed, the combination of the two reminds us of the *cakra* (sometimes claimed to be in the subtle body) that is at the base of the spine, called in some of the late Śaiva-type tantric texts 'middle of the body' (*dehamadhyā*) of one finger space (*ekāṅgula*), two finger spaces above the anus and two finger spaces below the penis (*medhṛa*), claimed by the *Vasiṣṭha*

64. *Sakalādhikāra* of Sage Agastya, pp. 2-3.

65. Karmarkar, p. 98.

66. Kapila Vatsyayan, *The Square and the Circle of the Indian Arts* (Roli Books International, New Delhi, 1983).

Samhitā to be triangular in human bodies (*manuja*), quadrangular (*caturasra*) in animals (*catuspad*), and circular (*maṇḍala*) in birds (*vihaṅga*), and always containing a thin (*tanu*) fire flame (*pāvākī*). This *cakra* membrane is sometimes called the perinium (*sivanī*, 'needle').⁶⁷

However, the Indian architectural classic *Mānasāra Śilpāsāstra* states that the base of the *liṅga* must match the particular *liṅga*. The translator claimed that the principal parts of the base (*pīṭha*) are the various parts of the ordinary *yonī* (female organ); they are presented in that text as five, the *nāla* (canal), *jala-dhārā* (water-holder, perhaps 'lips'), the *ghṛta-vāri* (hot fluid, presumably passageway for urine), *nimna* (depression, lower part), and *patṭikā* ('ribbon', presumably clitoris).⁶⁸ Of course, such descriptions are consistent with phallic worship, which has already been pointed out as not 'erotic'.

Since the female *pīṭha* should match the male *liṅga*, it is reasonable that the five go with the five-headed Śiva. The *Liṅga-P.* (I, Chaps. 11-16; II, Chap. 14) calls the heads the five Brahmans; the *Śiva-P.* (*Vāyavīyasamhitā*, II, Chap. 3) calls them the five 'embodiments' (*mūrti*). These sources show that the correspondence is basically by the five elements. B. N. Sharma's work on *Sadāśiva* adds from the *Viṣṇudharmottara-P.* the respective directions, which while secondary to the elements, do help somewhat for making the intended correspondences.⁶⁹ Before proceeding, it is well to mention that such a consideration may involve what Rāmānuja was criticising under *V-Sū*, II, 2, 35 or 36, as a Kāpālika position (that Sir R. G. Bhandarkar calls to our attention),⁷⁰ namely, imagining the soul (*ātman*) seated on the female organ (*bhaga*). So stated, it appears as a kind of obscenity, to wit, degrading the soul to the base level of the vulva. However, it could be interpreted otherwise: that the vulva itself has the perfection of representing all five elements in the correspondence system. The following list of the five 'heads' follows the order given by both the *Liṅga-P.* and the *Śiva-P.*, and I shall present *en passant* the reasons for making the given correspondences between the 'Male faces' and the 'Female spots':

67. *Vasiṣṭha* (n. 8, above), II, 8, 10; and I, 82.

68. Prasanna Kumar Acharya (n. 54, above), p. 74; Manasara Series, Vol. IV (Reprint, New Delhi, 1980), esp. p. 545.

69. B. N. Sharma, *Iconography of Sadāśiva* (Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1976), p. 3.

70. *Collected Works of Sir R. G. Bhandarkar*, Vol. IV, including Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1929), p. 181.

Male faces

Female spots

1. Īśāna – space (*ākāśa*), facing upwards *jala-dhārā* (‘ water cloud ’)

See B. N. Sharma, Chap. III, ‘ Consort of Sadāśiva ’ and Pls. XXXIV and XXXV, where this consort is represented in a frame that appears like the boundary of the opened vulva, hence the vulva ‘ lips ’. Thus is defined the area, which is in space. *Līṅga-P.* II, 14, 6, says that Īśāna is *kṣetrajñā* (knower of the field) and enjoyer of *prakṛti*.

2. Tatpuruṣa (its *puruṣa*) – wind, facing East *nāla* (‘ tube ’, ‘ canal ’)

The female spot is the woman’s vaginal channel, from which the babe emerges, as does the sun in the East, along with winds. *Līṅga-P.* II, 14, 7, says that Tatpuruṣa is the hiding place (*guhātmika*) of the supreme soul (*paramātmā*). Previously *Amarakoṣa* was cited for *prakṛtir yonilīṅge ca* (pre-genetic substance as the female sex) ; hence the field which is enjoyed by Īśāna.

3. Aghora – fire, facing South *nimna* (‘ depression ’)

The female spot is the lower part of the vulva. The association of fire with the direction South reminds us of the Vedic fire-sacrifice, where a brahmin who was ‘ full of the Veda ’ sat in the South, though with his back to it, to protect the rite against evil (hence *ghora*) from the South. *Līṅga-P.* II, 14, 8, says that Aghora is the embodiment of *buddhi* i. e. Mahat of the Sāṃkhya.

4. Vāmadeva – water, facing North *ghṛta-vāri* (‘ hot fluid ’)

The female spot is the urinary passageway, agreeing with the element water. *Līṅga-P.* II, 14, 9, says that Vāmadeva pervades everything by *ahamkāra*.

5. Sadyojāta (Sudden apparition) – earth facing West. *pāṭṭikā* (‘ strip ’)

The female spot is the clitoris. Also, see A. Wayman, “ Climactic Times in Indian Mythology and Religion ”, *History of Religions*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1975, Fig. 3, ‘ Touching earth as introitus of Citragupta pūjā ’. *Līṅga-P.* II, 14, 10, says that Sadyojāta is stationed in all beings as the *manas*.

Thus, the order adopted by both the *Līṅga-P.* and the *Śiva-P.* for the five heads or faces is clearly of Sāṃkhya nature : to present first the *puruṣa*, then the *prakṛti* of the primeval duality ; then the three evolutes in their usual sequence—*buddhi* (or, Mahat), *ahamkāra*, and *manas*. The five can be considered as the five-faced *līṅga* agreeing with the five-marked *yoni*.

The *liṅga* down, up, and lost

We start with the Vedic tradition, namely, *Rg-Veda*, X, 90, "To Puruṣa", 1-2, Puruṣa is thousand-headed, etc. "Having covered the earth (*bhūmi*) all over, he extended beyond in a 10-finger breadth (*daśa-aṅgula*)". It seems reasonable that the two opened palms placed adjacent are the "10-finger breadth" suggestive of an erect *liṅga*, and which "grows beyond by food". The Brāhmaṇa texts confirm this interpretation; cf. Thite: "The female and the male elements are sometimes mentioned indirectly by means of the words *ūna* or *nyūna* (lacking) and *atirikta* (exceeding)."⁷¹ The terminology 'exceeding' goes with my interpretation that the male yogin (as to the female one, *infra*), who has concentrated his force and consciousness within, is unaware of his own sexuality—which extends outside—let alone another's. From this standpoint, the Śaivitic depiction of the phallus as either pendant (non-ithyphallic) or erect (ithyphallic); the nude Jain Tīrthāṅkara with pendant phallus; the Buddha's male organ enclosed in a sheath—while looking different, amount to the same in the case of the fulfilled ascetic.

But the "looking different" is all-important in a worldly sense, since it must be acknowledged that the Buddhist depiction of enclosure in a sheath,⁷² i. e. concealment of the phallus, was a vital condition for Buddhism to spread beyond the borders of India to the Far East. It is not that another country is more moral. What all countries have in common is some vulgarity and cruelty, which two always win by having the most popular votes. Their lamentable victory in what the Hindus call the Kaliyuga overshadows whether Śiva's *liṅga* is down, up, or lost.

But, then, should such vulgarity in the context of Indian art and literature be interpreted in a symbolic manner, or be simply denounced?

C. Sivaramamurti's *Nataraja*⁷³ is a remarkable tour-de-force by the devotee who is also the master of the subject, commanding all the beauty, enth-

71. Ganesh Umakant Thite, *Sacrifice in the Brāhmaṇa-texts* (University of Poona, Poona, 1975), p. 248. As this author points out, "the male has something protruding, in excess, in the form of the testicles and the penis. The female lacks these protruding limbs".

72. Cf. Alex Wayman, "Contributions Regarding the Thirty-two Characteristics of the Great Person," *Sino-Indian Studies; Liebhenthal Festschrift* (Visvabharati, Santiniketan, 1957), p. 253, where this characteristic, "secret of privities drawn into a recess" (*kośopagatavastiguhya*) is associated with the three secondary distinctions, "navel deep", "navel well-rounded", "recess of navel filled up". While the reason for this association is not obvious, it is consistent with the information of n. 59. above, that the *Agni-P.* assigns to Viṣṇu the body section, above the knee, up to the navel.

73. C. Sivaramamurti, *Nataraja in Art, Thought and Literature* (National Museum, New Delhi, 1974).

ralled by the wonder of it all. So what some others might take to be a gross vulgarity is not such for him : it is transfigured. The master points out that Śiva dances at night, in fact starts at the *samdhi*, what I have referred to as the Divine Doors of evening.⁷⁴ And it is not all dark, because there is an effulgence from his head—like the fire on a distant mountain which shines, but not with enough light to permit the reading of books. The dancing Śiva has an admiring troupe (the *gaṇa*-s, *bhūta*-s, and so on).⁷⁵ Because of the darkness, even these spirit onlookers may not have noticed whether Śiva's *liṅga* was down, up, or missing.

The legends, often puerile, portray Śiva sometimes as the paragon of yogis and sometimes no more able to control sexual impulses than a sex maniac. The legends seem to read that Śiva sheds his seed copiously, while acknowledging that the ithyphallic *liṅga* sheds no seed as though the seed is shed by the non-ithyphallic *liṅga*!⁷⁶

If we prefer to defend this literature and the art depictions we can say that the upwardness of the *liṅga* is an indication (itself a *liṅga*) of an ecstatic condition. The Śaivite legends agree with the classification I once gave from Buddhist Tantra texts that there are three levels of non-discursive ecstasy. The first is based on sound (called mystically 'laughter'), the second based on sight, the third based on touch.⁷⁷

74. *Sakalādhikāra of Sage Agastya*, IX, 1-3, depicts Śiva's mystic dance. It starts in the unmanifest era (*avyaktayuga*), as though Śiva brings on the manifestation era. The attendant spirits are here listed, and they all sing praises of the dancing lord.

75. Cf. M. A. Dhaky, "Bhūtas and Bhūtanāyakas: Elementals and their Captains," in *Discourses on Śiva* (n. 42, above), pp. 240-256 for some of the attendant spirits.

76. Of course, the copious seed shedding is a feature of certain Śaivite myths; therefore, should not be construed in human terms (as though it were not a myth). In the human case, there is the Buddhist precept for the beginning ascetic, called the *yati*, that should his penis become erect, he should not touch it, with the elements earth, etc. (See Sanghasen Singh, *A Study of the Sphuṭārtha Sṛghānācārasaṃgraha-tikā*, Patna, 1983, p. 186). This alludes to the situation mentioned above from a Jain source that male sexuality craves the soft, which encourages the emission of seed. When O'Flaherty (*Asceticism and Eroticism*, p. 9) cites the *Mahābhārata* with Nilakaṇṭha's reference, "He is called *ūrdhvaliṅga* because the lowered *liṅga* sheds its seed, but not the raised *liṅga*," notice that this authoress is unable to cite a single Purāṇic source, although the *Purāṇas* are the principal sources of Śaivite legends that she cites. Let us simply conclude that the one reference she did find is just the failure of some writer, and now of this authoress as well, to read myths as myths : they always want to reduce certain elements to human terms and then allow the remainder to be considered myths. Emission of seed must come from the penis — because that is how humans do it, and if not from the raised penis, then from the flaccid penis! Well, then, since human mothers issue offspring by way of the vagina, Śiva's consort should do the same; but O'Flaherty herself cites stories to the contrary. And her p. 207, "Śiva's incarnation is born, as Skanda is, from the joining of several portions of seed in several different mothers," agrees with the mythic language.

77. Wayman, *The Buddhist Tantras* (n. 43, above), p. 53.

The other approach — that of Sir R. G. Bhandarkar — is to denounce the extreme sects such as the Pāśupata and the Kāpālikas. Especially for the latter Sir Bhandarkar uses expressions like “this ghastly picture of the wild aberrations of the human intellect and spirit”.⁷⁸ The Pāśupata group is responsible for the description of Śiva in the *Liṅga-P.*, I, 31, “Hymn to Śiva”; see the published translation of k. 28, f. “The Lord had vulgar traits. He was stark nude. He had smeared his limbs with ashes. ... Sometimes he laughed boisterously, sometimes he sang surprisingly. Sometimes he danced amorously and sometimes he cried repeatedly”.⁷⁹ This appears to be the *Bhikṣhātana* (Beggar) iconic form with the exposed *liṅga*.⁸⁰ Some modern books on Śaivite art seem to prefer erect *liṅga* depictions,⁸¹ although in the totality of Śiva iconography, this feature occurs only occasionally.⁸² Because of this modern frankness of reproduction, it

78. Sir Bhandarkar, Vol. IV (n. 70, above), p. 183.

79. *The Liṅga Purāṇa*, tr. by a board of scholars, Part I (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1973), p. 127. O’Flaherty (*Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 175-6) cites versions of the myth that when the “wives of the sages” saw Śiva naked and presumably with upright phallus, they fell in love with him, but he paid no notice (and in one version the sages castrated him). According to the Jain statement on female externally-oriented sexuality earlier in this paper, since this arises slower than the male kind, the stories which O’Flaherty cites are myths all right, but do not apply to the human case. As to the human situation, see the contribution of Ehsan Yarshater on Persian Poetry in the Timurid and Safavid Periods (*The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 6, ed. by Peter Jackson, pp. 973-4, ‘The beloved is not a woman’), citing a verse of the 14th century Hāfiz, very much like the *Liṅga-P.* description, of the young man in this condition who quickly arouses the love — not of women — but of homosexual men! This should point to the danger of interpreting myths to prove something (not to deny that such a procedure is sometimes profitable, whether or not illuminating).

80. Sivaramamurti, *Nataraja*, p. 112, depicts the *Bhikṣhātana* form, apparently with erect *liṅga*, its top covered by an encircling serpent.

81. Sivaramamurti, *Nataraja*, p. 293: “The *ūrdhva-medhra* is a special characteristic of sculptures from Bengal, Orissa and portions of Central India, especially noteworthy for suggesting the ascetic quality of Śiva.” Be that as it may, the theory of M. L. Varadpande, *Ancient Indian and Indo-Greek Theatre* (Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1981), p. 3, is that phallic deities like Pashupati Shiva, and Dionysus are associated with the theatre. Thus, the upright phallus is a suggestion that the dance when violent creates an ecstatic condition with a reflex influence on the sexual centre causing the erection, of which the dancer in his ecstasy is unaware. However, in the non-dancing pose, rather than Dionysus I could suggest a comparison with the Greek Poseidon. This is because of a depiction (modelled after a picture in A. B. Cook’s *Zeus*) showing Dionysus, Athena, and Poseidon, in Mary Settegast, *Plato Prehistorian: 10,000 to 5000 B. C. in Myth and Archaeology* (The Rotenberg Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1947), p. 86. Here Poseidon is shown nude (non-ithyphallic), holding his trident weapon, with a snake about his right leg, his horse in the background. On the other hand, Poseidon, in control of fresh water, is lord of the sea; but even here, Śiva is somewhat comparable in having the Gaṅgā at his head. Instead of a horse, Śiva has a bull named Nandin.

82. For example, P. Z. Pattabiramin, *Trouvailles de Nedoungâdou. Tandavas de Śiva* (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondichery, 1956), has many depictions of the dancing Śiva, with

(Continued on the next page)

is easy to find published depictions of Lakulīśa — the human who attained the status of Śiva — and with erect *liṅga*.⁸³

Sir Bhandarkar's denunciation agrees with an observation that not all the old phallic cults were transformed, reworked with Sāṃkhya terminology and finished up with Vedic materials. So also S. P. Gupta: "They [scholars who think it is all in the Vedic and Epic literature] start with the presumption that in the process of assimilation of the folk cults into organised religions, practically nothing remained unassimilated. One glaring example of this attitude is the *Ancient Indian Folk Cults* by V. S. Agrawala. Moti Chandra's article (1973) on mother goddess is another example. It can be multiplied ... The nude goddess is therefore neither Sri nor Lakshmi, nor Śrī-Lakshmi, nor Maya, nor Shakti."⁸⁴ It is as though the upward mobility of the Śiva cults in a marriage with the Vedic tradition left certain cults unimpressed with the value of social acceptance, determined to do their own thing, outrageous as it might appear to others.

Thus, there are two evolutions. The first urges that it all has a higher purpose, as though advising, "Be patient and sympathetic. Someday the glory of it all will dawn on you." The second insists that we should "call a spade a spade", since it is a fact that some persons are noble and some ignoble. Why pretend it is not so?

Is a *liṅga* necessary?

According to the Indian legends, Indra, the hero Skanda, and Gautama Buddha, have in common that they are born from the right side of their respective

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(Continued from the last page)

none exhibiting the phallus. But among the many depictions in Sivaramamurti, *Nataraja*, some exhibit the phallus, even the ithyphallic form. Lesser works need not be cited. The modern tendency extending also to the goddess depictions reaches an extreme in J. N. Tiwari, *Goddess Cults in Ancient India* (Sandeep Prakashan, Delhi, 1985), where the fourteen figures appear all to be of the shameless and headless woman with her legs apart, which I have shown to be the sepulchral earth. But the title and contents of this book would lead one to expect a different sort of supporting pictures.

83. Thus see Pl. 81 of Lakulīśa from Mathurā going with both U. P. Shah, "Lakulīśa: Saivite Saint", pp. 92-102, and Debala Mitra, "Lakulīśa and Early Śaiva Temples in Orissa," pp. 103-118, in *Discourses on Śiva* (n. 42, above). This Lakulīśa, either early B. C. or early A. D., founded a kind of Pāśupata sect. He is shown holding a club and a citron. Lavid N. Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas; Two Lost Śaivite Sects* (New Delhi, 1972), pp. 178-9, discusses the suggestions by Daniel H. H. Ingalls and others that the Pāśupatas had religious practices similar to the Cynics of Greece, while Lakulīśa is comparable to Hercules, who wielded a famous club.

84. S. P. Gupta, *The Roots of Indian Art* (B. R. Publishing corp., Delhi, 1980), p. 70.

mothers — which indicates a ‘ virgin birth ’.<sup>85</sup> In the case of Gautama Buddha, he looked down from a heaven and chose the to-be mother, presumably entering her womb in a subtle body. So all these births — even if this be taken as the mythological overlay — took place without the intervention of a phallus. Hence, the question : Is a *liṅga* necessary ?

The Pāli commentary on the *Buddhavaṃsa*, as Horner has translated it, shows the well-known attitude of the Buddhist scriptures that a woman cannot get to enlightenment through lack of a male organ. Thus the passage to be commented upon : Human existence, attainment of the (male) sex, cause, seeing a teacher, going forth, attainment of the special qualities, an act of merit, and will-power — by combining these eight things the resolve succeeds”. And the comment, in part : “ Even if he is existing in human status the aspiration succeeds only for one who is of the male sex. It does not succeed for women or for eunuchs, the sexless or hermaphrodites. And why is that ? Because there is no completeness of characteristics. Accordingly it was said in detail : ‘ It is impossible, monks, it cannot come to pass that a woman who is an arahant can be a perfect Buddha ’ [ translator gives the references M iii 65, A i 28 ]. Therefore for one of female sex even though she be of human birth the aspiration does not succeed ”.<sup>86</sup> However, those two scriptures deserve consultation.<sup>87</sup>

That passage claims that the phallus is necessary, but did not actually give the reason. The preceding information of this essay should clarify the meaning. It was held that the yogin, by concentrating his force and consciousness within, is unaware of his outward-extending sex. This is not believable or

85. For the hero Skanda, by his So. India name Kārttikeya, see Sadashiv A. Dange, *Encyclopedia of Puranic Beliefs and Practices*, Vol. 1 — (A-C) (Navrang, New Delhi, 1986), entry on ‘ Birth ’, p. 138, that Kārttikeya was born from Umā’s right side, breaking it (so *Matsya-P.* 157.39-40). For Indra and Buddha, see P. Banerjee, “ The story of Birth of Gautam Buddha and its Vedic Parallel,” *The Roopa Lekha*, 1933, pp. 82-84. All three were previously mentioned by Agrawal, *Matsya Purāṇa*, p. 246.

86. *The Clarifier of the Sweet Meaning (Mudhurattahavilāsini)*; Commentary on the Chronicle of Buddhas (Buddhavaṃsa) by Buddhadatta Thera, tr. by I. B. Horner (The Pali Text Society, London, 1978), pp. 132-3.

87. The two Pāli scriptures (M iii 65, and A i 28) have the same statements, having to do with skill in various topics, here, skill in the possible and the impossible (*sthāna* and *asthāna*, in Skt.). Both a man and a woman could be Arahants, but the woman cannot be a rightly awakened one (S. *samyaksambuddha*) or a universal emperor (S. *cakravartin*), while a man could be. A woman could not be a Sakka (S. *Sakra* = Indra), a Māra, a Brahmā, while a man could be any of those. These claims are curious, but can be understood in part this way : A woman could not be a Cakravartin, but since among his ‘ seven jewels ’ is the jewel of woman (= queen), she could be that. She could not be a Māra (the male tempter demon), but he had daughters practising seduction, and a woman could be that.

realistic to the ordinary person, because unable to imagine doing it, being so aware of his or her sex organ — by dint of early advice, along with taboos, from parent figures; and because becoming a sexual being through puberty is necessary for normal social relations. The Buddhist texts, on this account, appear reluctant to tell the true reason: it is that this tradition does not believe a woman by similarly concentrating her force and consciousness within would be free of her sexuality, since the main part of it is within her.

Nevertheless, in Mahāyāna Buddhism there grew a legend about a queen who took a vow that in all her lives she would be reborn a woman and attain enlightenment in that body; and she is deified as the Green Tārā.<sup>88</sup> And likewise, the legend does not explain why she is able to attain enlightenment while lacking a *liṅga*. But there is a hint on how she does it, because the iconography always shows her left foot retracted in the direction of the female organ, and her right foot resting on a lotus. The lotus has its roots in the earth and passes up through the water, to be opened by the warmth of the sun. Her foot on that lotus therefore presses upon that very point, as though by a mystery, that the future Buddha touched when he touched earth as 'witness' to disperse the forces of Māra. It seems to me she likewise defeats Māra, does that *yoginī*. It is through her very 'lack' (*ūna*) that she draws the power within her and is awakened to the enlightenment. Indeed the male had to rid himself of the 'outwardly extended' (*atirikta*) in order to be enlightened. And Dange, *Sexual Symbolism*, tells the story of an Asura woman named Dīrghajihvī ('long-tongued') who before the gods could taste the Soma would herself taste it and spoil it. Indra enlisted the help of a handsome man named Sumitra to 'manage' her.<sup>89</sup> He approached her and solicited a 'union'. She said: "You have only one organ, and, I have them at every limb of mine (*muṣkā*, Pl.); it (the act) may not be". Sumitra reported this to Indra who then supplied him with (male) organs at every limb. Returning to that woman he had union with her and subdued her.<sup>90</sup> Taking the hint of this story, we may further interpret the

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88. For Tārā's vow to gain enlightenment, see Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (La Libreria dello Stato, Roma, 1949), Vol. II, p. 389b-390a. For the color green as the mind of enlightenment, see Wayman, *The Buddhist Tantras*, pp. 74-6.

89. Notice that in Indian legends, when an ascetic was on the verge of success, thus to oust Indra from his post as leader of the 33 gods and take his place, Indra's seat would get 'warm', and he would pay notice to the danger, send down an apsaras to tempt the ascetic and thus thwart his yogic success. But how about the case when a woman ascetic is threatening to do the same — do precisely what the Buddhist scripture denied for her, namely, to become an Indra (or, more precisely, an Indrāṇī, female Indra)? Indra has to send a male tempter (a kind of Māra).

90. Sadashiv Ambadas Dange, *Sexual Symbolism from the Vedic Ritual* (Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1979), p. 114, referring to *Jai. Br.* I. 161,

iconography of the Green Tārā that her left foot, so retracted, not only closes off the orifice of the female organ (as normally located), but also closes off all the other orifices.<sup>91</sup> This closure was advised by the *Bhagavadgītā*, VIII, 12-13. previously cited. These orifices can also be understood as 'lacks', i. e. as drawing in, as does the female organ. That is to say, the Asura woman Long-Tongued could taste the Soma even before the gods because of her sensory deprivation.<sup>92</sup> The intention of the story is to suggest that when the orifices are functioning with normal intake, she gains the mundane, loses the supramundane. If disclosing such matters offends the gods (they love the mystic, despise clarity and consistency), there is at least one value: we can decide that *liṅga* is not necessary, but certainly useful.

Some persons might think that a command, "Stand up, O *liṅga*", has a sexual implication. Indeed, it does not intend such an interpretation here; and humans have had little luck in getting such a command to 'work' in the sexual sense. The *vajra*, which in Tantra appears sometimes to be used for the phallus, is in fact asked to 'stand up'. And this applies to the heart, so in the Buddhist Tantras according to the theory of the five *abhisambodhi* in the case of the third one:

"Thereupon, all the Buddhas bade him contemplate intensely the meaning of the *mantra*, "*tiṣṭha vajra*" ("Stand up, O *vajra*"). Having done so, he saw directly that Samantabhadra of the former thought of enlightenment under the shape of an upright five-pronged white *vajra* in his own heart.<sup>93</sup>

The Sadāśiva with five faces can also be contemplated in the heart; so *Śiva-P.*, *Śatarudra-saṃhitā*, VII, 2 (reporting the words of Nandikeśvara):

hṛtpuṇḍarīkaśuśire dhyātvā devaṃ tryambakam /  
tryakṣaṃ daśabhujam śāntaṃ pañcavaktraṃ sadā śivam //

"(I) meditated on the lord Tryambaka in the white-lotus cavern of the heart — who is Sadāśiva, calm, with three eyes, ten arms, and five faces.

Hence, my previous correlation of the five faces with five spots of the vulva now amounts to a five-fold concatenation between the heart and the vulva.

91. Cf. Wayman, *The Buddhist Tantras* (n. 43, above), Chap. 12, 'The Nine Orifices of the Body'.

92. Of Course, the name 'Long-Tongued' also suggests that she was practicing the advanced yogic technique of curling back her tongue to touch the uvula, although it would be sensational to establish this tantric technique as practised in *Brāhmaṇa*-composition times.

93. *Mkhas grub rje's Fundamentals of The Buddhist Tantras*, tr. from the Tibetan by F. D. Lessing and A. Wayman (Mouton, The Hague, 1968), p. 31.



The stand-up injunction is also applied to a Vedic sacrificial vessel called the *ukhā*, in the shape of a square pot. Vesci translates from the *ŚatBr* VI. 5. 4. 13: " 'Having risen, do thou become great', for these worlds, having risen, are great; 'and stand up steadfast!', that is, 'stand thou up firm and fixed!' " She identifies the verses as from *Vaj Sam.* XI. 64.<sup>94</sup> Here, "stand up!" is *ud u tiṣṭha*. That Vesci should then cite the *ŚatBr* VI. 5. 4. 15 for this *ukhā* as being the 'head' (*śiras*) of the sacrifice, is to my mind a significant element. This is because I once cited from the Buddhist Tantra a rite of enjoying the ambrosia (*amṛta*). The yogin starts with three vessels, in front of him a 'skull bowl' and two others on his right and left sides, all three containing offering materials. Presumably sitting cross-legged, the yogin meditatively 'raises' the pots in three steps until level with his own head. Then, apparently the skull bowl identified with his own head, he imagines the five 'ambrosias' in that skull bowl. The 'ambrosias' are the dread substances blood, semen, human flesh, urine, excrement (identified with the five Buddhas).<sup>95</sup> Also Kramrisch cites the *Kauṣītaki Br* 6. 1, that Prajāpati gathered the sperm of his four sons in a golden bowl, and from this arose the god of a thousand eyes, etc., who is Rudra.<sup>96</sup> That this golden bowl is equivalent to the 'head' is shown by Kramrisch's further citations that Rudra is born from the forehead of the Creator Brahmā, so also from between the brows of Prajāpati.<sup>97</sup>

And that *liṅga* standing up is of course the one already described in three parts, the top part being the 'head'. What is important is that on top is something sacred. This is S. P. Gupta's point, when discussing John Irwin's theories about the Vedic *yūpa* and Asokan pillars, namely, that it is when a pillar is surmounted by something sacred that it is worshipped, while the Vedic *yūpa* is uncrowned and so not worshipped.<sup>98</sup> So also Indra in *Rg-Veda* VIII, 14, 5, "having placed a plume in heaven" (*cakrāṇaḥ opasaṃ divi*), provided a model for various flagstaves, duly worshipped; cf. Varāhamihira, *Bṛhat-Saṃhitā* XLIII, "The Glory of Indra's Banner" (*indradvajasampad*). And so when the Śiva *liṅga* is in three parts, it is Śiva who takes the top third, to be worshipped by the Śaivites. And this top third is stylized after the glans, the extremity of the penis; and this may be considered a downward-pointing golden bowl, or the square-pot *ukhā* upside-down.

94. Uma Marina Vesci, *Heat and Sacrifice in the Vedas* (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1985), p. 202.

95. Cf. Wayman, *The Buddhist Tantras*, 'The Five Ambrosias', pp. 115-7.

96. Stella Kramrisch, *The Presence of Śiva* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1961), p. 100.

97. Kramrisch, *The Presence*, pp. 114, 115.

98. Gupta, *The Roots* (n. 84, above), p. 18.

And back to the heart, where some old Upaniṣads placed a 'person' (*puruṣa*) the size of a thumb, a Buddhist Tantra, the *Sarvarahasyatantra* as I have translated from the Tibetan canon with notes from Ratnākaraśānti's commentary,<sup>99</sup> has these verses ( II, 12-14 ) :

( 12 ) The yogin with mindfulness of the Buddha places the *līṅga* in the *bhaga* while contemplating as the body of a Buddha. He should contemplate the cloud of Buddhas.

( 13 ) The yogin with mindfulness of the Dharma places the *līṅga* in ( or, on ) the *bhaga* while contemplating the diamond Dharma. He should draw the rain from the cloud of Dharma.

( 14 ) The *līṅga* is explained as signs (*nimitta*), namely, the four kinds of *mudrā*-signs. The *bhaga* is explained as destruction, since it is the sublime destruction of defilement.

According to the commentary, *bhaga* means the lunar disk contemplated in the heart, with the *līṅga* or *vajra* (erect) upon the moon. "Diamond Dharma" means the central part of the *maṇḍala*; "cloud of Dharma" means the deity residents of the *maṇḍala*. The four kinds of *mudrā*-signs are the Buddha-sign, Bodhisattva-sign, Devī-sign, and Krodha-sign. But there are the scholars who will always interpret the *bhaga* as female-organ, the *vajra* or *līṅga* as the male-organ; of course, sometimes they are right. And the *Rg-Veda*, VIII, 14, 4, explains : ( Indra ) thrust Vala downward (*arvāñcam nunude valam*). So also, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underling". As a result : "Error will slip through a crack, while truth will stick in a doorway". So they all 'understand'.<sup>100</sup>

99. *The Sarvarahasyatantra*, (tr.) by Alex Wayman in *Studies of Mysticism in Honor of the 1150th Anniversary of Robo-Daishi's Nirvāṇam* (Acta Indologica, Vol. VI, 1914), pp. 521-569. Here I present in parallel format the Tibetan verses from the Tibetan Kanjur and my English translation, followed by notes extracted from the commentary.

100. I suppose there will always be those who would challenge Ratnākaraśānti's explanations, and assert : of course, *bhaga* means 'female organ', *līṅga* means 'male organ'; these later commentators are trying to 'clean up' the Tantra. I differentiate three kinds of persons who so 'understand'. One person understands the words because he is a university professor, skilled in the Sanskrit language, and able to know the situation through his own resources, since literal meanings are in his grasp. Some person depends on another, and understands because his guru told him so in that hermitage. Some other person depends on another, copying what that other wrote, despairing : How can I can ever finish my book if I have to figure out what is correct at every point — I have to copy from others ! All these three persons 'understand'.

## Conclusion

It does seem apparent that the term *linga* means 'extending toward'. Even in grammatical gender, the feminine words suggest an extending toward oneself, the masculine ones an extending outward, the neuter ones both movements. My conclusion from the usage in the six doctrinal systems was that *linga* meant a going toward. *Linga* as a subtle body is the movement inward, a metaphysical direction. And in Sāṃkhya the *linga* goes to dissolution, so also in the *Sarvarahasyatantra* goes to the *bhaga* which is destruction of defilement. And then, mystically, the *linga* is the death that moves to life and prosperity. And when Śiva lost his phallus, this *linga* extended all the way from earth to the sky; so what was lost mythically was the flaccid impotency along the horizontal; what was found was the vertical, surmounted by the sacred.

The topic especially uses sources from the non-Vedic traditions, although the Veda comes into the picture with some trenchant relevancies.

The article had to deal with some lower matters, and there is a saying, "If you wish to reach the highest, begin at the lowest". And the poet Longfellow wrote :

The shades of night were falling fast,  
As through an Alpine village passed  
A youth, who bore, mid snow and ice,  
A banner with the strange device,  
Excelsior !



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One Plus One Makes Three: Buddhist Gender, Monasticism, and the Law of the Non-excluded Middle

Author(s): Janet Gyatso

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Janet Gyatso

ONE PLUS ONE MAKES  
THREE: BUDDHIST  
GENDER, MONASTICISM,  
AND THE LAW OF THE  
NON-EXCLUDED MIDDLE

This article addresses the need for a more specific account than we now have of how the female is conceived in Buddhism. One reason for providing such an account is so that we can better construe what has variously been perceived as the misogyny of Buddhist traditions, on the one hand, and the deification of a feminine principle in Buddhism, on the other.<sup>1</sup> These perceptions have important ramifications as they bear on some difficult issues that are live in Buddhist communities today. One of those would be the controversial status of women in the practice of tantric sexual yoga, and another has to do with sex and gender hierarchies in Buddhist monasticism; I will be touching on the latter, but not the former, in the present article.

I am grateful to Charles Hallisey and Steven Collins for help on various aspects of this article. An earlier version was first presented as a lecture at the Harvard Divinity School and then at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, both in March 2001.

<sup>1</sup> Works critical of Buddhist misogyny and androcentrism include Diana Paul, *Women in Buddhism* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1979); Liz Wilson, *Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurations of the Feminine in Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *Thai Women in Buddhism* (Berkeley: Parallax, 1991); Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); and June Campbell, *Traveller in Space: In Search of Female Identity in Tibetan Buddhism* (London: Athlone, 1996). Books that take encouragement from Buddhist deifications of the feminine principle include Miranda Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism in India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Judith Simmer-Brown, *Dakini's Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001).

But just as much as for contemporary concerns, I am interested in the matter of sex and gender for other reasons too. I find the complex—and often inextricable—relation between gender conception and sexual anatomy to be an exceptionally rich resource, not only for theory, but also for ethical reflection. Such reflection might even have salutary impact on the contemporary issues to which I just alluded. Mind you, it is only barely the case that we can say that a notion of gender as such is explicitly identified in the sources I am looking at here. With the exception of one novel usage that does indeed seem to overlap with the function of the modern sense of gender, the traditional categories I explore in what follows seem to have been understood, perhaps unreflectively, as being based specifically upon sexual characteristics. Hence I have largely used the word “sex” to refer to those categories. Even these, however, came in many contexts to take on a metaphorical rather than strictly physicalistic denotation. Such metaphorical application already inches those categories over into the domain of what we now understand to be gender—not to mention the fact that even strict anatomical specification about sexual identity is relative and culturally constructed. Thus an occasional invocation of the idea of gender serves here to organize and highlight retrospectively the significance of a group of historical concepts and practices. To identify notions of gender in this way can provide a useful window on certain Buddhist understandings of body, personal identity, and religious meaning.

It might also be noted from the outset that this article endeavors to address a historical problem in part by a certain ahistoricism. This ahistoricism consists in taking an inchoate family of concepts from a small group of texts and, from a fairly limited period and speculating on the import of that conceptual family on the basis of how it developed later, that is, by reading back into the earlier formulation elements of how it came to be elaborated. Such a method is certainly not one that I would argue is always a good thing to do—in fact, not even one that is usually a good thing to do, especially if what one is trying to get at are the dynamics of a particular historical moment. However, in this particular case—where the early inchoate conceptual family is in fact itself about inchoateness, leading to a systematic fuzziness throughout its history; where, too, the later elaborations seem to stay close to the spirit of the earlier context and in fact salient clues from that later material draw our attention to things in the earlier material that we might not have noticed otherwise; and where, finally, we really have very little data to work with from that earlier moment in the first place—perhaps the method is felicitous.

## I

The founding moment of what is at stake here would be an early pronouncement on the nature of the female that occurs in the course of a fa-

mous interchange that is ascribed to the Buddha and his disciple Ānanda.<sup>2</sup> It concerned the ordination of women into the monastic order. The Buddha is said to have refused at first. When pushed by Ānanda the Buddha conceded that, yes, women could indeed attain enlightenment, but their presence in the order would render Buddhism vulnerable to quicker deterioration than it would have been without women in the order. Women monastics would act like rust, or mildew, to weaken the Dharma. Hence their necessary patriarchal subordination, which came to be enshrined as the famous Eight Heavy Rules, pronounced by the Buddha as his condition for agreeing to ordain women after all. In brief, the Eight Heavies legislate that all nuns must defer to all monks and accept them as their ritual and authoritative superiors, no matter what the discrepancies in seniority or merit.<sup>3</sup>

This settlement has been understood by modern scholars as a nod to the demands of Indian society, and it reminds us of the central importance that the early Buddhist order gave to its public status and image in order to maintain the support of the laity. The idea is that these lay supporters would have been disturbed by the formation of a community of independent, single women and that they would be mollified—and, most crucially, would continue to respect and underwrite the order—by the reinscription of such celibate women in a submissive relationship to their male masters. Now this assessment certainly has merit, but it is by this point a truism, too easy as an explanation of all androcentrism and misogyny in Indian Buddhism. Given the stakes, the matter deserves further consideration: the Eight Heavies arguably are one of the key factors in the eventual demise of the fully ordained female order in almost every Buddhist country save China.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the issue of status is especially germane today, at least

<sup>2</sup> Versions of this story and the Eight Heavy Rules appear to be present in all of our extant versions of the Vinaya. See Gustav Roth, *Bhikṣuṇī-Vinaya: Manual of Discipline for Buddhist Nuns* (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1970), pp. xxix–xxxi. See also Akira Hirakawa, *Monastic Discipline for the Buddhist Nuns: An English Translation of the Chinese Text of the Mahāsāṃghika-Bhikṣuṇī-Vinaya* (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1982), pp. 47–49, nn. 2 and 6. Anne Hiermann, “Chinese Nuns and Their Ordination in the Fifth Century,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 24, no. 2 (2001): 275–304, n. 41, has pointed out that Jan Nattier (*Once upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* [Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991], p. 30, n. 12), was mistaken in asserting that the story postdates the Sthavira-Mahāsāṃghika split. However, Nattier maintains that the Mahāsāṃghika version of the story is garbled, suggesting it is a later interpolation (personal communication, November 6, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> The order of the rules varies somewhat. See Roth, p. xxxii, for the list according to the Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya. The Pali version is in *Cullavagga* 10.1.1–6 (translated in I. B. Horner, trans., *The Book of the Discipline [Vinaya-Piṭaka]* [London: Pali Text Society, 1942], 5:352).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Nancy Auer Falk, “The Case of the Vanishing Nuns: The Fruits of Ambivalence in Ancient Indian Buddhism,” *Unspoken Worlds: Women’s Religious Lives*, ed. Nancy Auer Falk and Rita M. Gross (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1989), pp. 207–24. Gregory Schopen has made important contributions to our understanding of the competition between

for that portion of the women, both Asian and Western, who are currently attempting to revitalize the Buddhist nun's order as informed by a feminist sensibility. How are such modern female reformers going to be able to genuflect to the youngest male novice simply because he is a male—and therefore supposedly superior to them?<sup>5</sup> And yet if they fail to do so, how can they claim to be upholding the orthodox discipline with impunity, which is precisely what they need to do in order to regain legitimacy for the female order? Hence the possible edification in taking a closer look, not only at how exactly it was imagined that women would undermine the order in the first place, but also at what the very idea of woman represents here. Such an investigation will need to take account of both what is actually said about women, as well as the more abstract yet always revealing question of what the category of woman is defined *against*, that is, what it is defined *in contrast to*—especially in the specific context of Buddhist monasticism and the systems of ideology and practice to which it connects.

The focus of this study turns precisely on this point about definition, particularly definition *in contrast to*. It is interesting to notice that in Buddhist monasticism women were not only distinguished from men, their superiors and mentors in the order. They were also differentiated from another class of persons, persons who cannot receive ordination under any circumstances. This special class of persons who are barred from ordination includes several types of persons, but it is one such subgroup, whose description comprises the outermost bounds in sex and/or gender depiction (again, sex and gender are only partially distinguishable here), that deserves particularly close examination. This is a category of persons who are excluded from ordination on the grounds of their sex. It is my view that they can help us to appreciate the status of “normal” women in the Vinaya's rules as well. Challenging as this subgroup is to decipher, such examples at the edge take on a surplus of social meaning and provide a telling view of the terrain of sex and gender conceptions in the Vinaya overall, along with some broader insights into the implications of such conceptions.

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monks and nuns in the early centuries C.E., as well as the active role of nuns in the image cult and patronage before their demise. See his “On Monks, Nuns, and ‘Vulgar’ Practices: The Introduction of the Image Cult into Indian Buddhism,” in Gregory Schopen, *Bones, Stones and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), pp. 238–57, and “The Suppression of Nuns and the Ritual Murder of Their Special Dead in Two Buddhist Monastic Texts,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 24 (1996): 563–92.

<sup>5</sup> For impressive stories of twentieth century Thai nuns Voramai and Sara and Chongdi Bhasit, who acted on feminist sentiments, see Kabilsingh, *Thai Women in Buddhism*. And yet many modern and international bhikṣuṇīs produce apologies for the Eight Heavy Rules. See, e.g., Venerable Bhiksuni Wu Yin, *Choosing Simplicity: Commentary on the Bhikṣuṇi Pratimoksha* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snowlion Publications, 2001), pp. 81–89.



As for the larger class of those forbidden ordination in the early Vinaya (of which the subgroup under discussion is a part), we can readily understand why the sangha would have barred those who commit major crimes like murder, as well as those who lack permission from their parents or other masters, or who are fugitives from the law, or who are animals.<sup>6</sup> Another group of disqualifications is based on physical criteria: dwarfs, those missing a limb, the blind, the deaf, those with boils, or leprosy; all these may not join the order.<sup>7</sup> It would seem to be with these physically deficient types that the sexually marginal subgroup should be classed.<sup>8</sup> And yet why people whose sexuality is deficient or aberrant may not be ordained into the Buddhist order is not immediately evident. Little is said by way of explanation, but it becomes increasingly clear that more is at work here than a mere avoidance, on the part of the order, of embarrassing or unattractive abnormalities.

## II

What information do we have about this subgroup of sexual excludées? Unfortunately, there is little information about actual individuals who were in this class. There are several stories and passages that suggest the defilement or dangerousness of such persons, but these say more about the conception of the group as a whole than about particular individuals; most certainly, none of these passages give a sense of actual historical people.<sup>9</sup> However, the fact that the Āyurvedic (and closely related Tibetan)

<sup>6</sup> The list of what disqualifies a man from receiving ordination (P., *antarāyikā dhammā*; Tib., *bar chad* [the “impediments”]) varies significantly, but it often includes some of the serious *ānantarika* crimes such as murder of parents or an arhat. Lists from Pali Vinaya tradition may be found in *Mahavagga* 1.61; 2.22; 2.36.3; 8.30; 9.4.2 (translated in *Mahavagga* in I. B. Horner, trans., *The Book of the Discipline* [*Vinaya-Piṭaka*] [Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1951], vol. 4). For Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya lists, see *Vinayavastu*, Asian Classics Input Project (hereafter ACIP), Release 4 (New York, 1998), text KDOOO111.ACT, p. 73; and *Vinaya-Sūtra and Auto-Commentary on the Same by Guṇaprabha*. *Pravrajyā-vastu*, ed. P. V. Bapat and V. V. Gokhale (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1982), sūtras 117–54. Comparative remarks on the Dharmagupta Caturvargika Vinaya provided in P. V. Bapat with A. Hirakawa, trans., *Shan-Chien-P'i-P'o-Sha, a Chinese Version by Saṅghabhadra of Samantapāsādikā* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1970), p. li. The list of impediments to ordination for women is different, but it often includes more specifications of kinds of sexual ambiguity: *Cullavagga* 10.17.1; Roth, pp. 31–33; Hirakawa, pp. 61–62. See n. 71 below.

<sup>7</sup> Some of these listed in *Mahavagga* 1.71, 76.

<sup>8</sup> But in *Mahavagga* at least, being a *paṇḍaka* or hermaphrodite is listed with the first group, those who have committed crimes.

<sup>9</sup> The *Therīgāthā* tells that one of the past lives of Isidāsī was born as neither a male nor a female (*n'eva mahilā na purisa*), this condition being the fruit of bad karma: *The Thera- and Therī-gāthā*, ed. Hermann Oldenberg and Richard Pischel (London: Pali Text Society, 1883), p. 166 (translated in C. A. F. Rhys Davids and K. R. Norman, trans., *Poems of Early Buddhist Nuns* [*Therīgāthā*] [Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1981], p. 140). *Mahavagga* 1.61 relates how a *paṇḍaka* tried to induce monks, novices, and grooms to defile him (it is not specified what that would entail) upon which he was pronounced unchaste and not to be ordained. A

medical tradition quite standardly speaks of three, rather than two, options for the sex of a newly born baby does tell us that an empirically observable third sex was believed to exist in the general period under discussion.<sup>10</sup> In fact, this medical conception of a “third sex” turns out to be closely related to the class of sexual pariahs in Buddhist monasticism.

The early monastic sources provide several subtypes within the group of people excluded from male ordination on sexual grounds. These usually include the hermaphrodite (*ubhatovyañjanaka*), a class of people called *paṇḍaka*, and sometimes a class of people called *ṣaṇḍha*. Neither of the latter terms seem ever to be precisely defined; but as the Vinaya tradition develops, *paṇḍaka* becomes the term of choice that most often stands for the excluded third sex category as a whole. The category also comes up in the exclusions for female ordination. Women with various kinds of deficiencies or irregularities in their menstrual cycle are listed here along with other types, one of which, in several versions of the list, is the “woman *paṇḍaka*.” This indicates that there can be both male and female *paṇḍakas*; indeed, with the growing proliferation of subtypes within the sexually excluded class, one of the several ambiguities is whether these various terms refer to deviation from maleness, deviation from femaleness, or both.<sup>11</sup>

story in *Vinayavastu* tells of a *paṇḍaka* who wanted to take ordination so as to have opportunities for sex: ACIP text KDOOO111.ACT, pp. 131–32.

<sup>10</sup> The *Śārirasthāna* of *Carakasamhitā* assumes that there are three possible sexes of a child: male, female, and neuter (lit., “not male” [*napuṃsakam*]). The latter is specified by the commentary *Āyurvedadīpikā* to have a simple hole instead of a penis. See *Carakasamhitā Śārirasthāna* 4.10 and 14: Agniveśa, *Caraka Samhitā, Based on Cakrapāṇi Datta’s Āyurveda Dipikā*, ed. and trans. Ram Karan Sharma and Vaidya Bhagwan Dash (Varanasi: Chowkamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1976), 2:391, 393–94. Chapter 2 of the same *Śārirasthāna* only envisions two sexes for the newborn, male and female, but lists eight types of sexual abnormality between them: see n. 14 below. Compare the classical Tibetan medical text, probably codified in the twelfth century C.E.: *bDud rtsi snying po yan lag brgyad pa gsang ba man ngag gi rgyud* (hereafter *rGyud bzhi*) (Lhasa: Bod-ljongs Mi-dmangs dPe-skrun-khang, 1992), pp. 17, 29. The term *napuṃsaka* is used occasionally for the third sex in Buddhist sources as well: see n. 11 below.

<sup>11</sup> The root Pali Vinaya texts usually mention only two main types of sexual excludées, *paṇḍakas* and hermaphrodites (*ubhatovyañjanaka*), as in *Mahavagga* 1.61, 68, 69; see also *Milindapañha with Milinda-ñikā*, ed. V. Trenckner and P. S. Jaini (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1986), pp. 310, 94–95 (I. B. Horner, trans., *Milinda’s Questions*, 2 vols. [Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1963–64]). The Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinayavastu* regularly mentions the *ṣaṇḍha* (alternately, *ṣaṇḍa*) (Tib. *za ma*) along with the *paṇḍaka*. Vasubandhu lists *ṣaṇḍha*, *paṇḍaka*, and *ubhatovyañjanaka* as the three kinds of people excluded from ordination on sexual grounds: *Abhidharmakośam Bhāṣya Sphuṭārthā Sahitam*, ed. Swami Swarikadas Shastri (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1970), 2.1.c (1:137). But other than *Suttavibhanga* 1.9.1 (translated in Horner, *The Book of the Discipline [Vinaya Piṭaka]* [London: Oxford University Press, 1938], vols. 1–3), which specifies that there may be human, nonhuman, or animal *paṇḍakas*, I have found no definitions of the terms *paṇḍaka* or *ṣaṇḍha* as such until Yaśomitra, who distinguishes *ṣaṇḍhaka*, one who lacks either female or male genitals *by nature*, from the *paṇḍaka*, whose aberrational sex is due either to something undertaken on purpose or to disease or injury: *Sphuṭārthā Abhidharmakośa-vyākhyā of Yaśomitra*, ed. Narendra Nath Law (Lon-

The classic Indian medical work *Carakasamhitā* probably represents a more mainstream Indic tendency to consider the third sex a deviation from maleness in dubbing the condition *napuṃsaka*, “not-male,” but here too, Ayurveda tradition also gives indication of female varieties of this growing class of sexual aberration.<sup>12</sup> In general, the medical tradition attributes the third sex state to physical conditions, such as there being an equal balance of this person’s mother’s and father’s seeds.<sup>13</sup> Like the monastic sources, the medical sources recognize a variety of sexual aberrations rather than portraying such a phenomenon as uniform, mentioning not only hermaphroditism but also congenital sexual dysfunctions, infertilities, and the absence of sexual organs altogether.<sup>14</sup> The medical tradition

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don: Luzac & Co., 1949), p. 94. The terms *ṣaṇḍa/ka*, *ṣaṇḍha/ka*, and *ṣāṇḍya* are also known to the classical Ayurvedic tradition, as in *Carakasamhitā Śārīrasthāna* 2.21 and *Suśrutasaṃhitā Śārīrasthāna* 2.41–42, 44. See also nn. 74–76 below. On the set of five kinds of *pañḍaka*, see n. 16 below, but even there the term is not defined as such. An instance where the term *pañḍaka* stands for the class of sexual anomalies as a whole may be found in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinayavibhanga* where it repeatedly forms a trio with male and female in the specifications of kinds of proscribed sex. But the analogous Pali text, *Suttavibhanga*, regularly lists instead four kinds of people with whom sex is forbidden: males, females, *pañḍakas*, and hermaphrodites. *Cullavagga* 10.17 and other lists of disqualifications for female ordinands (see n. 6 above and n. 71 below) confirm that there can be a woman *pañḍaka*. *Vinayavibhanga* also regularly distinguishes the category of male *pañḍaka* (Tib. *ma ning pho*). *Pañḍaka* is defined by Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, new ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1956) as a weakling or eunuch. “Eunuch” is a common translation for *pañḍaka*, but this is clearly inadequate to cover its semantic range. Leonard Zwilling, “Homosexuality as Seen in Indian Buddhist Texts,” in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. Jose Cabezon (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 204, asks if the etymology could be from *apa* + *aṇḍa* + *ka*, “with (eggs =) testicles (taken) away.” But Steven Collins (personal communication, February 20, 2001) rejects this theory since there is no other example of *apa* → *pa* in Pali even if *api* → *pi* is common. Other labels for sexual anomalies that merit exclusion from ordination are also to be found in the root Vinaya texts. For example, *Vinayavastu* (ACIP text KDOOO111.ACT, p. 69), characterizes the three kinds of anomaly as the state of lacking genitals (*mtshan med* = *animitta*), of having two genitals (*mtshan gnyis* = *dvinimitta*? or *ubhatovyañjanaka*), and of being a *gle* ‘dams, which can refer either to a castrated man or to a woman whose vagina and anus are joined (= *sambhinnavyañjanā*, see also n. 70 below). Occasionally the term *napuṃsaka* is also used in Buddhist sources for sexual anomaly: *Paramatthadīpanī: Dhammapāla’s Commentary on the Therīgāthā*, ed. E. Müller (London: Pali Text Society, 1893), p. 260. Other terms from Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition may be culled from *Mahāvvyūtpatti*, ed. R. Sasaki, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan, 1965), including *vātāṇḍa*, *ekāṇḍa*, *anāṇḍa*, *puruṣānuḥkṛtisrī*, *stryānuḥkṛtipuruṣa*, *aṇḍalāṅgulapraticchanna*, *sadāprasravaṇī*, *alohinī*, and *naimittikī*. A widely used Indic term for the sexually anomalous person is *kliba*, but it does not seem to occur in Buddhist sources: see Wendy Doniger, *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991), pp. 79–85. Compare n. 14 below.

<sup>12</sup> *Suśrutasaṃhitā Śārīrasthāna* 2.43 refers to the conditions for the birth of a female who acts like a man, and a comment on *Suśrutasaṃhitā Śārīrasthāna* 2.45 asserts that there are both female (*nārī*-) and male (*nara*-) kinds of *ṣaṇḍhas*: Priya Vrat Sharma, ed. and trans., *Suśruta-saṃhitā* (Varanasi: Chaukhambha Visvabharati, 2000), 2:137.

<sup>13</sup> On the balance of the parents’ seeds see *Carakasamhitā Śārīrasthāna* 2.18; the same view is echoed in Tibetan medical tradition.

<sup>14</sup> *Carakasamhitā Śārīrasthāna* 2.17–21 indicates eight types of sexual abnormality: (1) Hermaphroditism (*dviretas*) resulting from a vitiation of the embryo’s genital cells and an equal division of the parent’s sperm and ovum. (2) A wind condition of the organ

also describes certain congenital irregularities in sexual practice, some of which anticipate an interesting list of five kinds of *pañḍakas* found in certain Buddhist monastic sources; but while the medical sources attribute all such anomalies to abnormal physical causes, the Buddhist sources seem less certain about the etiology of these states.<sup>15</sup>

A monastic list that focuses on kinds of *pañḍakas* in particular seems to emerge in the early centuries C.E. in several Buddhist traditions, but its precise chronology is unclear.<sup>16</sup> The list singles out five main types: those

(*pavanendriyatva*) resulting from a wind (*vāyu*) problem in the testicles of the foetus. (3) A condition of weak sexual desire (*saṃskāravāha*) caused by a wind obstruction in the seminal passage. (4 and 5) A sexually deficient state (*kliba*) in either males or female caused by weakness or insufficient seminal substances in the parents. (6) Bent shape (*vakri*) of the male organ, caused by weakness of the father's organ and a resistance to sex on the part of the mother. (7) A condition in which pleasure derives from jealousy (in watching others have sex) (*irṣyati*), a proclivity produced by the parents' jealousy and reduced arousal. (8) The congenital state of being a eunuch, caused by a wind or fire condition that destroys the testicles (*vātikaṣaṇḍaka*).

<sup>15</sup> In addition to the *irṣyati* mentioned in *Carakasamhitā*, *Suśrutasaṃhitā Śārīrasthāna* 2.38–41 also describes other congenital aberrations in sexual practice: *āsekyā*, the condition, due to weak seminal substances in the parents, in which one gets an erection from consuming the semen of others; *saugandhika*, the condition in which one is aroused by the smell of female and male genitals, a result of being born from a putrid vagina; and *kumbhika*, the condition in which one is aroused by receiving anal penetration. Compare the *irṣyati* and *āsekyā* *pañḍakas* in the Buddhist monastic descriptions in n. 16 below. On the Ayurvedic attribution of all such conditions to the person's parents, see *Suśrutasaṃhitā Śārīrasthāna* 2:47.

<sup>16</sup> The earliest source I have found would seem to be *Vinayavastu*, from the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya (ACIP text KDOOO111.ACT, p. 132), although the date of this text is not known. The list is absent in the Pali Vinaya root texts and seems first to emerge in Pali in Buddhaghosa's Vinaya commentary, *Samantapāsādikā* (ed. J. Takakusku [Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1924; reprint, 1999], p. 1016). These two examples of the list diverge in their understanding of some of the types. The Mūlasarvāstivāda list is also represented in Gunaprabha's *Vinaya-Sūtra*, sutras 130–33; see also sutra 18. A later source is Yaśomitra's commentary on *Abhidharmakośa* 2.1, where he traces the list specifically to the Vinaya, but distinguishes an Abhidharma view of the *pañḍaka*, which would focus on the (dys)function of the sexual faculty or organ (*indriya*): *Sphuṭārtha*, pp. 94–95; cf. n. 52 below. The list of five is as follows: (1) The *Vinayavastu*'s *jāti-* or *jātyāpañḍaka* (*skyes nas ma ning*), a congenital condition in which the infant is neither male nor female, corresponds to the *Samantapāsādikā*'s *napuṃsaka*, a child born without determinate gender. Yaśomitra calls this the *prakṛtipañḍaka*. Compare the use of the term *jātinapuṃsaka*: *Paramatthadīpani* (see n. 11 above), p. 271. (2) The *Vinayavastu*'s *pakṣapañḍaka* (*zla ba phyed pa'i ma ning*), someone who is a female half the month and a male for the other half, corresponds to the *Samantapāsādikā*'s *pakkhapañḍaka*, here explained as someone who, as a result of bad karma, is a *pañḍaka* for the dark half of the month but is relieved of their sexual cravings in the light half. On changing sex, see nn. 61–66 below. One Tibetan exegete explains this monthly cycle entirely in terms of sexual desire: this *pañḍaka* has male sexual desire for half of the month and female sexual desire for the other: dGe-'dun 'Grub, *Legs par gsungs pa'i dam pa'i chos 'dul ba mtha' dag gi snying po'i don legs par bshad pa rin po che'i 'phreng ba*, in *'Dul ſik rin chen 'phreng ba* (Beijing: Mi-rigs dPe-skrun-khang, 1999), p. 50. (3) The *Vinayavastu*'s *āsaktapṛadurbhāvi pañḍaka* (*'khyud nas ltang ba'i ma ning*), someone who “comes out” (which could either mean becomes aroused or ejaculates) when embraced by another, has a different sense in the *Samantapāsādikā*'s “sprinkled” or *āsitta pañḍaka*, there explained as one who performs oral sex on another and is sprinkled with impurity. Note that the Sanskrit *āsakta* would be derived from the root *ā√sanj* whereas the Pali *āsita* would be derived from *ā√sic*. Yaśomitra aligns himself with the *ā√sic* etymology in naming this the *āsekapañḍaka*, but he does not discuss the term

who are born as either neuters or sexually indeterminate, those who have lost their sexual organ or capacities due to circumstances after birth, those whose sexuality changes every half month (in some versions from male to female and back again), those whose sexuality depends on the initiation of others (or, in another version, having oral sex), and those whose sexuality is engaged by voyeurism. Tibetan sources are familiar with this list but tend to boil down the kinds of *paṇḍaka* (generally translated as *ma ning*) into three main subtypes: the asexual neuter, the hermaphrodite, and the changing “half-monther.”<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that neither *paṇḍaka* or *ma ning* are code words for homosexuality as such, as some have argued, and in any event same-sex sex is not singled out as distinct from other kinds of proscribed sexual activity in the Vinaya.<sup>18</sup> This is not to say that those who practice certain types of what is considered deviant sex are not also named by the label of *paṇḍaka*. As just seen in the list of five, they are, but there is no sign that the conception of such deviance

further. We should also compare here *Suśrutasamhita*’s sexual condition called *āsekyā*: see n. 15 above. (4) The *Vinayavastu*’s *irṣyāpaṇḍaka* (*ma ning phrag dog can*), a *paṇḍaka* with jealousy, is explained as the voyeur, someone who is aroused by watching the actions of others. This type corresponds to the *Samantapāsādikā*’s *usuyyapaṇḍaka* as well as to the condition of *irṣyāratī* listed in the Ayurvedic literature (see nn. 14 and 15 above). (5) The *Vinayavastu*’s *āpatpaṇḍaka* (*nyams pa’i ma ning*) someone who becomes a *paṇḍaka* by virtue of adventitious conditions such as illness or surgery corresponds to the *Samantapāsādikā*’s *opakammikapaṇḍaka*. Yaśomitra calls this the *lūna* (mutilated) *paṇḍaka*. For an idiosyncratically Tibetan rendition of the list, see dBang’dus, *Bod gangs can pa’i gso ba rig pa’i dpal ldan rgyud bzhi sogs kyi brda dang dka’ gnad ’ga’ zhiḡ bkrol ba sngon byon mkhas pa’i gsung rgyun gyu thog dgongs rgyan* (Beijing: Mi-rigs dPe-skrun-khang, 1983), p. 410. In general the list remains relatively stable across South Asian and Tibetan Buddhism, but discrepancies indicate some confusion about what the individual types refer to. Type 3 *paṇḍaka* seems more clearly conceived by *Samantapāsādikā*, while type 2 seems more clearly conceptualized in *Vinayavastu*. Yaśomitra understands types 2–4 to suffer various kinds of impairment in the functioning of their sexual faculty (*indriya*), a functioning that is signalled by the ability of the male organ to generate pleasure (in orgasm) and to produce offspring.

<sup>17</sup> *mtshan med pa*, *mtshan gnyis pa*, and *’gyur ba ma ning*. The earliest occurrence of this widely used trio may be the grammatical work *rTags ’jug: Sum cu pa dang rtags kyi ’jug pa*, ed. Zuiho Yamaguchi (Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 1973), p. 9. It is standard by the time of Zurmkhar-ba Blo-gros rGyal-po, *rGyud bzhi’i ’grel pa mes po’i zhal lung* (hereafter *Mes po’i zhal lung*), 2 vols. (Beijing: Krung-go’i Bod-kyi Shes-rig dPe-skrun-khang, 1989), vol. 1, e.g., pp. 219, 698. As referenced above in n. 11, an almost parallel trio occurs in the Tibetan translation of *Vinayavastu*: *mtshan med*, *mtshan gnyis*, and *gle gdams pa*.

<sup>18</sup> I study monastic prohibitions against sex in “Sex,” in *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, ed. Donald Lopez (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming). It seems that people who desire conventional homosexual sex, whatever that might be, can be ordained and can stay ordained, as long as they do not actually have sex. Exactly the same would be true for people with heterosexual desires. Zwilling, p. 205, destroys his own argument that *paṇḍakas* are homosexuals when he writes, “The Vinaya, in fact, goes so far as to distinguish sexual activity between normative males from sexual relations between a socially normative male and a *paṇḍaka*.” Some depictions of *paṇḍakas* do show them engaging in sex with men, as in *Vinayavastu*, pp. 131–32, where it is also specified that a *paṇḍaka* wanted to play the role of the female. Homosexual activity is also suggested in the descriptions of the *Samantapāsādikā*’s understanding of the *āsitta paṇḍaka*; see n. 16 above.

has to do with the sexual identity of the partner. Moreover, at least as much, and perhaps more, than it is about sexual practice, *paṇḍakahood* is also an abnormal physical condition, and indeed both lists of subtypes just mentioned betray an undecidability about what the *paṇḍaka* state most basically concerns—physical traits such as anatomy, virility, and fertility, or certain desires and practices. For all these reasons it is difficult to find one word to adequately translate the full semantic range of either *paṇḍaka* or *ma ning*. In what follows I am simply going to use the Indic or Tibetan term, as appropriate, alternating occasionally with “the third sex,” a phrase also known to contemporaneous Indic sources.<sup>19</sup>

### III

Now if the class as a whole is difficult to characterize, it is nonetheless excluded as a whole from a variety of Buddhist practices, not only from ordination. A variety of other monastic prescriptions also forbid the *paṇḍaka* and related types from acting as preceptors in ordination ceremonies, and even disqualify them from making donations to begging monks.<sup>20</sup> There are also exclusions that go beyond monasticism altogether. Even the otherwise (and famously) inclusive Lotus Sūtra lists the *paṇḍaka* as someone who may not be preached to at all. Along with such other characters as heretics, hunters, magicians, dancers, and pig farmers, the *paṇḍaka* is in the unfortunate class of people whom the bodhisattva is enjoined to avoid, even when performing that most bodhisattva-like activity, teaching Buddhism.<sup>21</sup> This prohibition seems harsh and surprising indeed; even if one is convinced by yet another exclusion to which the *paṇḍaka* is subject, namely, an inability to meditate (or so claim a number of scholastic works),<sup>22</sup> surely such persons deserve at least to hear the Dharma! But another classic Buddhist text, *The Questions of Milinda*, specifies that *paṇḍakas* and hermaphrodites are among those who are not able to understand the Dharma at all.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Trīṭyāprakṛti* occurs in *Kāmasūtra* and *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

<sup>20</sup> *Mahavagga* 1.69, 38.5.

<sup>21</sup> Leon Hurvitz, trans., *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p. 209.

<sup>22</sup> For example, *Visuddhimagga* 5.40–42 (translated in Bhaddantācariya Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification*, trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, 2 vols. [Berkeley: Shambhala, 1976]) avers that both hermaphrodites and *paṇḍakas* are among those who cannot develop *kasina* concentration, or indeed any kind of meditation at all, due to their defilement and bad kamma. *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 4.43 also asserts that neither *paṇḍakas* or *ṣaṇḍhas* are subject to any of the three disciplines (from verse 13: those of monasticism, meditation, and the pure path), nor indeed the absence thereof.

<sup>23</sup> *Milindapañha*, p. 310. The others on this list are similar to those who cannot take ordination: see n. 6 above. But note that *Vinayavibhanga* expels from ordination monks who revile (*sun phyung ba*) *paṇḍakas*—along with, among others, *bhikṣuṇīs* (ACIP text KD000311.INC, p. 15).



The proliferation and seriousness of such exclusions, which imply that the third sex is incapable of any salvific activity whatsoever, distinguish the *paṇḍaka* from the other classes barred from ordination and signal that something special is afoot. That there is a fair amount of confusion regarding this is evident from the few terse explanations concerning the exclusions that are offered, for they are neither consistent nor satisfying. Abhidharma tradition reasons that a certain lack of restraint (*asaṃvara*) is required in order for there to be a basis for a vow of restraint. The idea seems to be that the *paṇḍaka* does not have enough sinful willfulness to have something to take a vow against.<sup>24</sup> Yet in the same breath the *paṇḍaka* is accused of just the opposite problem: having too much and too unstable, desire.<sup>25</sup> And the same could be said of the monastic list of five: again, that list includes both those whose sexuality is limited physiologically and those who have perverse or extra sexuality.

If we could separate the *paṇḍaka* class into its component parts we could at least solve this last contradiction. It would be more logical if it were only the neuter *paṇḍaka* who could not take vows due to the absence of a desire to transgress (i.e., if one accepts the basic premise of this oppositional logic at all). Similarly, it should only be the *paṇḍaka* with either both or changing sets of sexual organs who is plagued by excessive or indecisive desire. But this still does not solve the most puzzling problem of all here. For it is not clear why these various *paṇḍaka* qualities are considered such a liability in the first place. Is it not a virtue in Buddhist tradition to be poor at discriminatory thought, the very attribute that so oddly disqualifies the *paṇḍaka* from meditation?<sup>26</sup> And would not the equanimity in the *paṇḍaka*'s lack of strong desires or intentions to transgress be a good thing, an advantage, rather than a failing, disqualifying someone from the Buddhist order?

<sup>24</sup> *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 4.43: *pāpe 'pyasthirāśayatvāt*. See also *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 4.97, where it is added that the *paṇḍaka* does not have strong enough feelings for its parents for it to be a candidate for violating the rules against the serious (*ānantarya*) crimes of patricide, etc. But cf. n. 6 above, regarding the listing of the *paṇḍaka* right next to committers of these crimes in the lists of ordination exclusions.

<sup>25</sup> *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 4.43 attributes this excess to having the desires of both sexes: *ubhayāśrayakleśādhimātrata*. See also n. 9 above.

<sup>26</sup> This connection is especially clear in Tibetan sources. For example, 'Jam-dbyangs bZhad-pa (1648–1721), *bSam gzugs kyi snyoms 'jug rnams gyi rnam par bzhaḡ pa'i bstan bcos thub bstan mdzes rgyan lung dang rigs pa'i rgya mtsho skal bzang dga' byed* (photocopy of block print), pp. 21–22, attributes the *paṇḍaka*'s inability to make distinctions (*so sor rtog pa mi bzod pa*) to its inability to attain meditative absorption, along with its lack of shame and circumspection (*ngo tsha* and *khrel yod pa*). The *paṇḍaka* shares these problems with the inhabitants of Uttarakuru. Thanks to Jeffrey Hopkins for this reference. Compare *Milindapañha*, pp. 94–95, which maintains that *paṇḍakas* are among those who cannot keep a secret because of being fickle and indecisive. *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 4.80 makes similar points about the *paṇḍaka*'s inability to establish, and therefore also to destroy, virtuous roots.

## IV

Given the seemingly universal negative gloss for the third sex category, it is surprising to discover that a positive estimation of *pañḍaka* features did indeed come to be recognized, and in a variety of Buddhist traditions, outside monasticism. Such a recognition seems to have emerged gradually, but we can discern a developing sense that something about the *pañḍaka* class actually mirrors virtues that Buddhism extols.<sup>27</sup> This development becomes notable largely in Tibetan sources, but it builds on associations and suggestions found in Indian Buddhism as well.

Most readily, there is the third sex's middleliness—its equal proportion of its parents' seeds, its fetus sitting in the middle of its mother's belly, and so on<sup>28</sup>—that comes to be associated with the highly esteemed Middle Way in Buddhism. A number of early Tibetan manuals, for medical practice as well as from the yogic tradition, make just this point, extolling the middleliness of the *pañḍaka* class and using it as a marker of stability and equanimity: (here citing the Tibetan term,) *ma ning* is called the abiding breath between male exhalation and female inhalation;<sup>29</sup> *ma ning* is the stable psychic wind, as opposed to the shaking male wind or agitated female wind;<sup>30</sup> *ma ning* is the balanced yogic channel, as opposed to the too tight male channel, and the too loose female one, and so on.<sup>31</sup>

A distinctive development in Tibetan medicine really drives home, with spectacular effect, a Buddhistically positive association with the *pañḍaka* class. Here influenced by the Chinese diagnostics of pulse reading, Tibetan medicine introduced an innovative threefold (rather than the Chinese twofold) division of pulse types: male, female, and *ma ning*. The root Tibetan medical text sets the standard: a male pulse is thick and throbs roughly; a female pulse is fine and throbs quickly; and a *ma ning* pulse is steady, slow, and pliable.<sup>32</sup> Given the medical tradition's high valuation

<sup>27</sup> I am preparing a separate article on the distinctive Tibetan construal of the *pañḍaka/ma ning* class.

<sup>28</sup> *Carakasamhitā Śārīrasthāna* 2.18, 24–25.

<sup>29</sup> Yang-dgon-pa rGyal-mtshan dPal, *rDo rje lus kyi sbas bshad*, in *The Collected Works (Gsun 'bum) of Yan-dgon-pa Rgyal-mtshan-dpal* (Thimphu: Kunsang Topgey, 1976), 2:457. Note that this work is also published in *gSang chen thabs lam nyer mkho rnal 'byor snying nor*, ed. Dor-zhi gDong-drug sNyems-blo (Beijing: Mi-rigs dPe-skrun-khang, 1991), which incorrectly identifies the author as a Sa-skyapa.

<sup>30</sup> Sa-chen Kun-dga' sNying-po, *Lam 'bras gzhung bshad sras don ma*, in *Lam 'bras slob bsad: The Sa-skyapa Teachings of the Path and the Fruit, according to the Tshar-pa Transmission* (Dehra Dun: Sakya Center, 1983), pp. 4, 266–67.

<sup>31</sup> Yang-dgon-pa, p. 454. Also, an early medical text, gYu-thog Yon-tan mGon-po's *sKor tshoms stong thun bcu gcig las gnyis pa chu'i stong thun*, in *Gyu thog cha lag bco brgyad: A Corpus of Tibetan Medical Teachings Attributed to Gyu-thog the Physician* (Delhi: Topden Tshering, 1976), 1:343–50, can speak of three kinds of digestive juices—male, female, and *ma ning*—without explaining these terms; that suggests that this gendered tripartite taxonomy, in which the *ma ning* category stands for a middle point along a continuum, was already well known.

<sup>32</sup> rGyud bzhi, p. 560; *Mes po'i zhal lung*, 1:699.



of harmony and equilibrium, we are not surprised to see that this middle *ma ning* type gets such a good prognosis—a person with this pulse will live long, have few diseases, high status, and will be looked on favorably by people in power.<sup>33</sup> But nothing shows more how far the ostracized *paṇḍaka/ma ning* class has come than the astounding Buddhist superlative that the text goes on to provide: the *ma ning* pulse is glossed “bodhisattva pulse”—the pulse of the exalted enlightened beings who by the time of the Mahāyana practically share the same status as a buddha.<sup>34</sup>

This is quite a transition from the pariah status of the *paṇḍaka* class in the Vinaya, but like much else about this elusive category, the reason for its identification with the bodhisattva is never explained. One can find a few clues, however. One is from Buddhist Abhidharma notions about the moment of a baby’s conception. The classic account, famously anticipating Freud’s Oedipal complex, says that the little being who gets sandwiched between the seeds of a man and woman in coitus, will, if it is to be a boy, lust for his mother-to-be and resent his future father, while the girl-to-be will do the opposite, lusting for her father and hating her mother.<sup>35</sup> Yet when Buddhist scholastics went on to describe the moment of conception for a bodhisattva, who takes birth deliberately and out of compassion, they stipulated that this little being would realize that the mating couple is to be its parents and not the proper object of sexual desire or jealousy, and therefore would have affectionate love equally for both of them.<sup>36</sup> This distinctive specification is echoed in an early Tibetan tantric source that describes the same moment, but this source is accounting not for the bodhisattva-to-be but rather for the *ma ning*-to-be. The scene that is depicted may be indebted to the scholastic description of the bodhisattva embryo: the *ma ning* too has equal love for both parents.<sup>37</sup>

If the *paṇḍaka*’s association with equanimity parallels the bodhisattva’s egalitarianism, the sex-changing *paṇḍaka* in particular exhibits another kind of affinity with the bodhisattva. Sex change in Buddhism is a rich issue deserving of a study on its own; the topic will come up again below. Note for now that the Lotus Sūtra is one of the first to associate it

<sup>33</sup> But apparently those below will resent them and—a curious detail—their male relatives will arise as enemies: *rGyud bzhi*, p. 560.

<sup>34</sup> Although the medical tradition usually uses the term *byang chub sems rtsa*, which could be rendered “*bodhicitta* pulse,” the root text *rGyud bzhi* does use the longer phrase *byang chub sems dpa’ ir rtsa*, “bodhisattva pulse,” on p. 560; repeated also in *Mes po’i zhal lung*, 1:700. The several occurrences of the abbreviated term *byang chub sems rtsa* in the root text could be explained by metrical considerations.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Kritzer, pp. 4–5, in “The Four Ways of Entering the Womb (*garbhāvakrānti*),” *Bukkyo Bunka* (Buddhist culture) 10 (2000): 1–41.

<sup>36</sup> See Kritzer, pp. 18–19, citing the *Vibhāṣā*.

<sup>37</sup> gNubs-chen Sangs-rgyas Ye-shes, *Sangs rgyas thams cad kyi dgongs pa ’dus pa’i mdo’i dka’ ’grel mun pa’i go cha lde mig gsal byed rnal ’byor nyi ma*, in *Rñin ma bka’ ma rgyas pa*, ed. H. H. Bdud-’joms Rin-po-che (Darjeeling: Dupjung Lama, 1987), 52:131–32. I am grateful to Jake Dalton for this reference.

with the bodhisattva. The compassionate bodhisattva must be able to appear in any appropriate body so as best to teach and enlighten the full range of sentient beings; such a deliberate display often involves sex change, along with occupation, class, and even species change.<sup>38</sup> Now in contrast to this exalted power, the cyclical sex changes of the *paṇḍaka* appear to be involuntary, not deliberate or compassionate. Nevertheless at least one development in Buddhism recognized the parallel. It comes up in yet another striking step in the refiguration of the sexual pariah: a rare and intriguing example of the third sex personified as a tantric Buddhist deity: mGon-po Ma-ning. Actually the texts give little indication of the grounds for construing this mysterious and probably uniquely Tibetan form of the famous Indic deity Mahākāla as in fact of the third sex. And since the deity is usually pictured fully dressed, and often standing next to a female consort, there is some reason to wonder whether it is meant to be a *ma ning* as such. But there are a few terse suggestions that do indicate its unconventional sex. One is that the special talent of this deity resides precisely in its lack of determinate sexual identity. As one visionary writes, “It is because [this deity] is not definitively either male or female that it is able to accomplish the work of all buddhas.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, the *ma ning* deity has a sexual indeterminacy, an indeterminacy that mirrors an enlightened flexibility in its salvific power.

Connectivity, a virtue related to flexibility, also comes to be attributed to the third sex class. We can discern such an idea in the distant domain of Tibetan grammar, which nonetheless remains under the influence of Buddhist tropes. When discussing the way that consonants interact with other consonants, letters are divided into the categories of male, female, and *ma ning*, along with subtypes, which for the *ma ning* are given as “no signs” (Tib. *mtshan* and Skt. *linga* both mean either linguistic sign or genitals), “two signs,” and “changing signs”; in other words, the familiar Tibetan trio for types of *paṇḍaka* persons. The point requires more discussion than space permits here. Suffice it to say for the present context that the flexibility implied by the *paṇḍaka* features of having two signs or changing signs is deployed in Tibetan grammar as a metaphor to show how sounds can join with other sounds (making for a kind of intrasyllabic *sandhi*), which makes possible phonic connection and indeed oral articulation altogether.<sup>40</sup> Such connectivity suggests still other enlightened

<sup>38</sup> Hurvitz (n. 21 above), pp. 307–8, 314–15.

<sup>39</sup> rDo-rje Gling-pa, *dPal ye shes kyi mgon po ma ning nag po'i gsang ba 'khor lo'i rgyud*, in *dPal ye shes kyi mgon po ma ning nag po'i chos skor* (Thimphu: Kunzang Tobgyel, 1984), p. 93; *pho mo gang du'ang ma nges pas / sangs rgyas kun gyi 'phrin las bsgrubs*.

<sup>40</sup> This argument is based on my reading of the *rTags 'jug* (see n. 17 above) and its commentaries, particularly Si-tu Pan-chen Chos-kyi 'Byung-gnas (b. 1699/1700, d. 1774), *Yul gangs can pa'i brda yang dag par sbyor ba'i bstan bcos kyi bye brag sum cu pa dang rtags kyi 'jug pa'i gzhung gi rnam par bshad pa mkhas pa'i mgul rgyan mu tig phreng mdzes* (Dharamsala: n.p., 1960), pp. 74–80. It concerns the discussion of suffixes in Tibetan; in fact all

virtues for the third sex category—one even counters the problematic exclusiveness of the Vinaya. This turns up again with the tantric deity mGon-po Ma-ning, whose power is said to reside in its *inclusiveness*. As one of its proponents wrote, “It is because it is complete with all three—male, female and *ma ning*—that [the mGon-po Ma-ning tantra] is held to be the tantra of the great congregation.”<sup>41</sup>

It is not difficult to see why the middle term—which covers the gray area in between two opposite poles, and which, precisely because of its lack of strict allegiance, can assume features of either of those two poles—could come to symbolize inclusiveness. But the implications are far-reaching. They could be seen to touch on some of the most foundational ideas in Buddhism. For one exceptional example, consider the fact that a key Buddhist buzzword “nondual” is used to refer to the third sex category in both the Tibetan tantric and medical writings that valorize the category.<sup>42</sup> Now the locus classicus for the notion of nonduality in Buddhism is of course Buddhist philosophy, nowhere more paradigmatically worked out than in the attack on essentialism by the Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna. One of the principles that Nāgārjuna pretends to respect in this attack is the law of the excluded middle—the law that an entity must either be *a* or *not-a*; there is no middle ground—but actually his respect of this law is part of his *reductio ad absurdum*. In other words, he does mobilize the law of the excluded middle—for example, in his chapter in *Madhyamakārikā* on causation—but ends up showing that this law only pertains to positions that make dualistic, essentialist (and thereby false) assertions. If in fact one drops all such dualistic assertions, the law of the excluded middle becomes moot, or better, irrelevant.

What better instance of an actual “excluded middle” than the reviled *paṇḍaka*? Or so one might ask. Yet, inspired by the way that Nāgārjuna (and several Western philosophers too)<sup>43</sup> has called the law of the excluded middle into question, I submit that the third sex class can also be read as

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letters are subject to changing degrees of strength or weakness depending on the varying phonic contexts created when they join with various suffixes, but only the terminology of the *ma ning* letters explicitly names that changeability. I am presenting this argument in detail for another publication.

<sup>41</sup> rDo-rje Gling-pa, p. 92: *pho mo ma ning gsum tshangs bas / 'dus pa chen po'i rgyud du bzung*.

<sup>42</sup> For example, *Mes po'i zhal lung*, 1:699; cf. rTse-le sNa-tshogs Rang-grol, *dPal ye shes kyi mgon po ma ning nag po'i srog dbang bka' gtad zab mo'i las rim*, in 'Ja' tshon pod drug gi dban dpe, by rTse-le sNa-tshogs Rang-grol and Nag-dban mthar-phyin (Leh: Tobdan Tsering, 1978), pp. 377–78: *pho rgyud dang mo rgyud kyi rigs dang sde tshan gang yang 'dis mi 'thul ba'i gnyen por ma gyur pa gcig kyang med cing thabs shes gnyis su med pa'i ye shes kyi sku yin pa na ma ning gi mtshan du btags pa yin pas*.

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., Michael Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); for a lucid introduction to some of the mathematical issues involved, see Alexander George and Daniel J. Velleman, *Philosophies of Mathematics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), chap. 4.

functioning to undermine its own exclusion. Such a reading would have particularly rich significance for gender theory. To recognize a middle term, with its ability to breach gaps, to connect, and to transform, is to illustrate by its very mucosity (as feminist theorist Luce Irigaray might put it) the impossibility of any definitive demarcation, least of all exclusion.<sup>44</sup> If indeed the two sexes are not bipolar extremes but rather are understood to be on a continuum—that is, if they do not have strict boundaries that, once crossed, become the opposite of what they started with—then they do not exclude a middle term, precisely because they are not “essential,” to use the Buddhist parlance, in themselves. By the same token, just to name the third or middle term is exactly to call into question any strict separation of the other two. In this way, the same third sex that was defined as the excluded one could be turned on its head to subvert the very notion of excludability altogether.<sup>45</sup>

## V

We have come a long way, from the social and ritual arena of Buddhist ordination to the rarified domain of theory—not to mention the fact that the points in the last paragraph were never actually made in historical Buddhist writings at all. But we still need to ask where all this would leave the hapless and excluded third sex people themselves—let alone the hapless female people, the second sex for monastic law, from whom this article took its first cue. The salvific potential of Buddhist logic notwithstanding, we cannot help but notice that the actual conditions of people, alas, do not necessarily improve in the wake of theoretical advancements. Even to argue, as some Buddhist texts actually did do, that all sexual identity is a construct and an illusion, did not historically erase all sex discrimination in Buddhism—far from it.<sup>46</sup>

At the very least, though, the rich theoretical potentials of the third sex category, not to mention its actual valorization in some corners of Buddhist history, makes us wonder all the more pointedly: why did the category remain a problem for monasticism? But to answer this question, the first thing we need to realize is that despite all those positive profiles of the third sex that were just marshalled—not just for philosophy but also in tantric physiology, grammar, even sacred iconography—none of these were really about actual third sex *people*: rather, in each case the third

<sup>44</sup> The notion of mucosity is developed in Irigaray's essay “Sexual Difference,” in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 175.

<sup>45</sup> I would submit that the concept of a third sex accomplishes such subversion more effectively than does the often-cited goddess chapter in *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, which endeavors also to show the provisional nature of sexual identity, albeit merely by demonstrating it through magical fiat.

<sup>46</sup> This point was first made in sustained form by Paul (n. 1 above).

sex stands for a principle, a concept, a category—a gender. This realization will bring us to the heart of the Vinaya's litany of sexual exclusions.

Consider first, for another moment, the Tibetan medical pulse diagnostics: just where one would most expect to find actual empirical bodies. But even here, we are tipped off to the fact that it may not be sexual anatomy that is being described by the use of the term “nondual” to gloss the *ma ning* pulse—and now I will add that these same passages also connect male pulse with “skillful means” and female pulse with “gnosis.”<sup>47</sup> For these very terms—“gnosis,” “skillful means,” and “nonduality”—indicate that what the doctors are really looking for when they read someone's pulse is not sexual anatomy but rather the presence, somehow, in their patients of one of these three very classic tantric Buddhist virtues: gnosis, skillful means, or nonduality.<sup>48</sup> This is only confirmed further when the root text quite explicitly distinguishes body type from pulse type. Women can have male pulses, men can have female pulses, and both women or men can have the bodhisattva/*ma ning* pulse.

This is not to say that the pulse tradition has nothing to do with the actual sexual anatomies of bodies at all. For one thing, the pulse/sex split is not altogether neat. The medical writers still maintain that *most* males will have a male pulse, females a female pulse, and *ma nings* a *ma ning* pulse.<sup>49</sup> That is because the primary issue concerns the predominance of one of these tantric patterns—that is, either skillful means, gnosis, or nonduality—in one's basic energy. Or perhaps we could call it character. This character pattern then produces certain physical manifestations, in accordance with classic tantric conceptions. So, people with dominant skillful means will tend to have male bodies, and also a male pulse. And so on. Still, most medical commentators maintained the possibility of deviance: “From one perspective,” Zur-mkhar-ba Blo-gros rGyal-po (sixteenth century), one of the most influential commentators, writes, “it is uncertain.”<sup>50</sup> Here he displays the empirical bent of the medical tradition after all, for the fact of the matter is that Tibetan doctors regularly find persons whose pulse character does not match their sexual anatomy; this is already asserted by the root medical text.<sup>51</sup> But this finding proved controversial, and it prompted Zur-mkhar-ba to creatively adapt an old Buddhist scholastic term, “mind-continuum” (Tib. *sems rgyud*), for his own purposes, making it mean something like what we would call “personality,” and which is something, he asserts, that can change during a person's lifetime. He

<sup>47</sup> *Mes po'i zhal lung*, 1:699.

<sup>48</sup> Several medical writers, including Gong-sman-pa (fifteenth century) and bKra-'bum-pa (eighteenth–nineteenth century), make the point that the characterizations of a pulse as *ma ning* and so on are metaphorical (*dpe don sbyar ba*): dBang-'dus, pp. 410–11.

<sup>49</sup> *Mes po'i zhal lung*, 1:699–700.

<sup>50</sup> *Mes po'i zhal lung*, 1:700.

<sup>51</sup> *rGyud bzhi*, p. 560.

distinguishes this mind-continuum from basic sex (which he labels with another scholastic category, *indriya* [Tib. *dbang po*]) and suggests that the latter cannot change. To drive home the distinction he proclaims, “There can be a woman who possesses a man’s mind-continuum, but that does not automatically mean that she has actually becomes a man.”<sup>52</sup>

It is certainly striking to see a debate on the third sex category lead to the conclusion that women can have male personalities. And indeed the pulse doctrine has valorized deviation all along: men who develop a female pulse will be healthy and live long, the root Tibetan medical text proclaims; and women who have male pulses will be powerful and bear many children.<sup>53</sup> In other words, we can say that Zur-mkhar-ba in effect introduced, with his “mind-continuum” category, a working notion of gender. And this gender-like category of mind-continuum is especially germane for our purposes in this article. For in breaking the bounds of strict anatomical definition and allowing for flexibility and deviance, such an idea brings the very inflexibility of the Vinaya into high relief. One is tempted to propose, at the very least, that the Vinaya would have been well served by the clarity attained by the physicians: anatomical sex and personal qualities—gender, if you will—can be separated. At the very least, it seems unfortunate for the Vinaya to allow anatomy to become so determinative of spiritual value, to assume so simplistically that someone whose sexual organ was ambiguous would themselves be of ambiguous, or changing, or unreliable moral worth, incapable of taking vows or even practicing the Dharma at all.

But now this thought prompts one to go back for another look at the anatomy put forward by the Vinaya. For it is still not entirely clear why a true neuter, a person who purportedly lacks sexual organs completely, should be classed in the same category as a person who has both male and female organs, at least on biological grounds. Nor is it evident why sexual dysfunction belongs in the same class: it should not necessarily be the case that the “halfer”—the changing *paṇḍaka*—is not fully sexually active, and the same can be said of the hermaphrodite for that matter (and

<sup>52</sup> *Mes po'i zhal lung*, 1:699. Zur-mkhar-ba’s use of these terms differs from their sense in the *Abhidharmakośa*. The Tibetan *sems rgyud* would be equivalent to the Sanskrit *cittasāntati* as in *Abhidharmakośa* 3.3, but the meaning there is very general, referring to all mental activity and capacity, with no mention of gendered features. *Indriya* does serve as a label for male and female sexual identity in the *Abhidharma*, where it seems to be a basic force that produces, respectively, male or female genitals along with other gender-specific features: see, e.g., *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 2.1b. See also Zwilling (n. 11 above), p. 206, discussing Buddhaghosa. However, in both Sanskrit and Tibetan there is a certain slippage whereby *indriya* or *dbang po* sometimes refers to the sexual organ, particularly the male organ, as such. An example would be Yaśomitra’s definition of the castrated *lūnapaṇḍaka* as one whose *indriya* is cut (*cheda*): *Sphuṭārthā*, p. 94. The relation of *indriya* to sexual identity merits more study.

<sup>53</sup> *rGyud bzhi*, p. 560.

as already mentioned, *paṇḍakas* are often pictured as being oversexed). And then even people whose *paṇḍaka* state is not innate but acquired, for a whole variety of nonbiological reasons, come to be included in the class. In short, this third-sex *paṇḍaka* category, rather than being consistently or coherently defined, is starting to look more than anything like merely a loose catchall for an ever-expanding array of sexual aberrations on ever-shifting grounds—even psychological and social ones.

And yet this very catchall character is actually very significant, for it suggests a theoretical unity in the class after all. In other words, perhaps we can see that the Vinaya's conception of the *paṇḍaka* is, unwittingly, a gender category itself. Even though there are attempts to specify the anatomy of some of the forms of *paṇḍakahood*, the category as a whole stands most centrally for a conceptual class, to wit, a class of people whose universal characteristic is simply to be unspecifiable and aberrational. Or to put it another way: taken as a whole, *paṇḍaka* is the category of the uncategorizable. And such a category is very relevant for Buddhist monasticism indeed.

Not only does it tell us that even for the Vinaya, the *paṇḍaka* was a conceptual category after all, rather than representing a precise or specifiable anatomical condition of particular persons. We should also note that such a gendered conceptual category has a very special meaning, one that is quite different from the tantric gender metaphors that we saw in the medical case. While for medicine and tantric yoga the third term signifies balance, flexibility, and health, I propose that for the Vinaya it is the aberrationality of the third sex that has the most salience, precisely because of its dissonance with the dominant ideology of the Vinaya. For if indeed the third-sex class does stand for sexual aberration and uncategorizability, it is no wonder that it was such a pariah in the Buddhist monastic world. Why do I say that? Let us remember what the Vinaya is about.

The Vinaya represents the laws of a community of renunciates. These are people who have left home, changed their identities profoundly, and sworn off many things: taking what is not given, depriving any being of life, bragging about attainments, handling money, causing discord, and so on, all codified in a strict and extremely detailed set of rules. Arguably, the most important regulation, and the one considered the most difficult of all to maintain, is sexual abstinence—this is obvious from the premier place that sexual regulation has in the monastic lawbooks.<sup>54</sup> And yet it is far from fully clear what actually constitutes such a transgression. If one is raped, has one broken the vow never to have sex? If a monk has an unintentional emission during sleep, does that break the vow? What if he takes no action overtly, but passively enjoys an accidental encounter? Is

<sup>54</sup> This point and the following are argued in Gyatso (n. 18 above).



it a question of intention or of what the body actually does? Are there gray areas, half-transgressions, which deserve repentance but not expulsion? Actually, such nuanced and tortured questions accompany many of the regulations in the Vinaya, not just those about sex. Read the Vinaya literature from its earliest texts onward: you cannot fail to be impressed with the utter preoccupation, nay, obsession, with trying to pin down strict dualistic distinctions. The Vinaya struggles over and over to make it clear in just what cases a transgression really *is* a transgression, exactly what kind of transgression, how it is determined that it has taken place, and precisely what or who is responsible.

And so if the *paṇḍaka* class most basically is defined as people who are not definable, who are not definitively either a male or a female<sup>55</sup>—and especially if, as a medical writer so pertinently put it, the *ma ning* is “the one who has no opposite” (*go ldog*)<sup>56</sup>—no wonder such a person in its very undefinability would have represented an abomination, as Mary Douglas surely would say. The *paṇḍaka* is an abomination, then, not to the doctors, but to the monastic legalists, because the very project of the Vinaya depends on exact definition, and decision, and vow-taking, and the distinction between purity and defilement. The one whose principal defining feature is to be “whatever” in this way *had* to be excluded from the monastic order.

## VI

It is far from an innovation, then, for the Tibetan pulse diagnosticians to have treated the third sex as a metaphor or idea rather than a specification about actual people; it had functioned as such all along in the chapters of Buddhism we have looked at. What *is* an advance on the medical side, however, is the recognition that characteristics associated with one sex can be exhibited by people of the opposite sex. In other words, it is the heuristic separation of sex and gender (not unlike one of the foundational moves of modern feminism) that has liberating potential both for the third—and now we can see that we could call it either sex or gender—as well as the second. But before going further, I must caution against too simplistically faulting the Vinaya out of hand for its failure to make that separation, for its conflation of body and meaning, and for placing such symbolic importance on the physical appearance of purity and disciplined order, especially given the very controversial and ground-breaking posi-

<sup>55</sup> This is how it is defined in the *Vinayavastu*’s description of the *jātyāpaṇḍaka* (ACIP text KDOOO111.ACT, p. 132) and in Yaśomitra’s gloss of the class of *paṇḍakas* and *ṣaṇḍhas* in general (*Sphuṭārthā*, p. 94); see also *Mes po’i zhal lung*, 1:219: *de gnyis kar ma nges pa ma ning*.

<sup>56</sup> gYu-thog Yon-tan mGon-po (?), *rTsod bzlog gegs sel ’khor lo*, in *Gyu thog cha lag bco brgyad*, 1:327.



tion in India that Buddhist monasticism represented. This quite understandable and in fact vital concern with public status, which as already noted, was behind the overt androcentrism of the monastic code, also explains the exclusion of sexually marginal persons.

Nor would we want, at least from a feminist perspective, to rule out generically the basic premise proposed both by Buddhist monasticism and meditative traditions that a correlation obtains between body and meaning. Such a correlation was to be explored quite precisely in both yoga and ritual as a way of bringing philosophical and ethical norms into lived bodily and social experience, and it underlies the entire tradition of personal cultivation regarding which Buddhism has made such notable contributions.

So if we must pause before insisting unilaterally that sex and gender must always be rigorously separated—a separation against which feminists themselves have cautioned, if for no other reason than to say that even sexual identity itself has no self-evident reality that is totally free of culture—what we can call for is more precision, at least to separate fact from fiction, especially concerning the material facts themselves. The current Dalai Lama has argued that Buddhism must revise its doctrine when it is contravened by modern science. I would submit that part of the problem we have been examining here is a recurring carelessness in Vinaya tradition about the facts of sex. No less influential a systematizer than Buddhaghosa can proclaim with a straight face that a woman can get pregnant by looking at a man; or by hearing, like the *balākā* bird who gets pregnant by hearing thunder; or by smell, like the cow who gets pregnant by smelling the breath of a bull.<sup>57</sup> More dismaying yet, in passages that otherwise attempt to be very precise and physicalistic about sexual intercourse, there is an apparent conflation of the vagina and the urethra in some of the early Vinaya material.<sup>58</sup> These gaffes are surprising given what we have learned from Kenneth Zysk about the central role of the early Buddhist monastic community in developing the systems of Ayurveda, that is, the main Indian medical tradition, overall.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> *Samantapāsādikā, Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Vinaya Piṭaka*, trans. J. Takakusu and M. Nagai (London: Pali Text Society, 1924), p. 214.

<sup>58</sup> This is indicated by the repeated use of the label *passāvamagga*, “path of urine,” for the vagina, e.g., *Suttavibhanga* 1.9.1. In the corresponding passage of *Vinayavibhanga*, the Tibetan translation gives *zag byed*, “defiled” for vagina, seemingly readjusting the Sanskrit semantics, and aligning itself with standard Buddhist misogynist views of female sexuality. There seems also to be some ingenious etymological acrobatics at work there: *Mahāvvyutpatti*, entry no. 9227, indicates that *zag byed* corresponds to Skt. *prasrāvaṇa[karaṇa]*, “urine maker.” Normally Tib. *zag* or *zag bcas* translates Skt. *āsrava*.

<sup>59</sup> Kenneth Zysk, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India: Medicine in the Buddhist Monastery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Still, fictions are revealing for what they betray. This is especially so for the anomalies of the third sex, which of course have long been recognized empirically, but which nonetheless have historically been subject to distortion and worse in so many societies.<sup>60</sup> And yet like other such instances, the Vinaya's images of this group—fantastical as some of its members might be—are telling for what they say about the Vinaya's larger notions of sex and gender. So in this final portion of the article I would like to pursue the meaning, and the metaphors, of the Vinaya's third sex/gender just one step further. To consider especially its more outlandish representations will also shed some light on how the Vinaya construes women.

Ponder, then, the sex-changing *paṇḍaka*, a concept in full evidence by the time of several of the Vinaya's systematizers. The image should be connected to other notions of sex change that were beginning to circulate in Buddhism, most notably the often-studied sūtra stories about women who change into men before attaining Buddhahood.<sup>61</sup> Less noticed in Western scholarship is another important subtype, found in Vinaya legal tracts. Salient examples can be found in the set of stories in Buddhaghosa's commentary, such as the one about a monk who wakes up one morning to find his beard and male shape gone, and female features in their place;<sup>62</sup> or another, from the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya tradition, about a nun who is walking alone down a path and suddenly transforms into a male.<sup>63</sup> The point of these passages is ostensibly to lay out the legal implications of a sex change, to reassure the aggrieved monk-turned-female that he (i.e., she) can retain status in the order (albeit now in a nunnery!), or to work out the liabilities if the person changing sex is in the middle of committing an offense that is sex-specific. For instance, the nun walking down the dangerous path is no longer in legal jeopardy when she turns into a male, because only nuns are forbidden to walk alone on deserted paths, not monks. But we might shift our focus for a moment to the underlying premise of these jurisprudential pronounce-

<sup>60</sup> Gilbert Herdt, ed., *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History* (New York: Zone Books, 1993); Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

<sup>61</sup> See Paul (n. 1 above); a more recent study is Jan Nattier, "Gender and Enlightenment: Sexual Transformation in Mahāyāna Sūtras" (unpublished manuscript, University of Indiana, 2002).

<sup>62</sup> *Samantapāsādikā*, 1:273.

<sup>63</sup> Mi-bskyod rDo-rje (1507–55) mentions these in passing in his 'Dul ba ñi ma'i dkyil 'khor: *A Detailed Commentary on the Vinayasutra and Buddhist Monastic Discipline* (New Delhi: Eighth Kham sprul Don-grgyud-ñi-ma, 1973), 1:348, with reference to a larger discussion on Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya sources. For the rules about what happens when a sex change takes place during an ordination session, see Guṇaprabha's *Vinaya-Sūtra*, sūtras 618–19. dGe-'dun Grub, pp. 381–86, provides a good example of the intricate Tibetan elaborations on the legal implications of various kinds of sex change in the Vinaya.

ments. Since it is only at three sex changes that one must forfeit one's entitlement to monastic status altogether,<sup>64</sup> it appears that spontaneous sex change once or twice (and this is not about psychology or practice—it is about full anatomical transformation)<sup>65</sup> is something that is presumed to be a relatively innocuous event!<sup>66</sup>

I have already noted how the sexual instability epitomized by the *paṇḍaka* marks it ineluctably as anathema and pariah for the monastic order. I would now like to add a further and I think important nuance: the same instability also renders the *paṇḍaka* a mirror of monastic fantasies about women. Most obviously, the dreaded sex change, which at least one kind of *paṇḍaka* embodies, has a lot to do with a simple male fear of becoming female; this is grossly apparent in the monastic truism, duly repeated by Buddhaghosa, that male genitals are superior to female genitals. He also expresses the view that male genitals are more stable than female ones: it takes strong negative karma for a male's organs to disappear and only a bit of weak positive karma to reemerge as a female; conversely, even weak negative karma can cause a female to lose her female organs, and strong good karma is required for her to acquire male organs.<sup>67</sup> But the point can also be made on more general grounds: I am arguing that the *paṇḍaka*'s spectre of looming sex change and capricious sexuality betrays anxieties about uncontrollable sexuality period, and surely no figure is more centrally associated with sexual uncontrollability in Buddhist literature than the female. This is especially true in the Vinaya stories surrounding the celibacy rules, with their repeated cases of women raping monks, exposing themselves, running up to sit on a monk while he sleeps under a tree; even venerable female patrons try to convince monks that the gift of sex is the highest gift a lay donor can offer.<sup>68</sup> Nowhere is the monastic presumption of oversexed woman more overt than in the striking

<sup>64</sup> The history of this restriction deserves further study; it does not seem to be present in the early layers of the Pali Vinaya. And it is not the same condition as the *paṇḍaka* who changes sex every month. Three-time change occurs in a list of what prevents ordination in Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya tradition in *Vinaya-Sūtra*, sūtra 617. A key early Tibetan Vinaya exegete explains that after three changes one lacks any reliable identity as either a male or a female, and so cannot take ordination in either order; it is also what renders one a *paṇḍaka*: mTsho-sna-ba Shes-rab bZang-po, 'Dul tik nyi ma'i 'od zer legs bshad lung gi rgya mtsho (Beijing: Khrun-go'i Bod-kyis Shes-rig dPe-skrun-khang, 1993; reprint, 1998), p. 214.

<sup>65</sup> The only hint to the contrary that I have found is in dGe-'dun Grub's characterization of the half-month *paṇḍaka*: see n. 16 above.

<sup>66</sup> It also does not render one a *paṇḍaka*: mTsho-sna-ba, p. 214.

<sup>67</sup> He also grants that for both sexes, the disappearance of their original genitals is a result of bad deeds and the growth of genitals of the opposite sex is a result of merit; in this he seems to be most concerned about the undesirability of having your genitals change, no matter what you are originally, and also to assume that to be left with no genitals at all (i.e., to be a *paṇḍaka*) would be a bad fate indeed. *Samantapāsādikā*, 1:274.

<sup>68</sup> A paradigmatic set of examples may be found in the first section of the *Suttavibhaṅga*.

discrepancy in the monastic rules whereby any erotically prone physical contact with a man spells a nun's irreversible expulsion from the order, while a monk will only be expelled if he has full-fledged sexual intercourse.<sup>69</sup>

So sexual uncontrollability is a feature common to both *paṇḍaka* and woman. But that is not the only "female" quality that I find refracted in the *paṇḍaka*. There are even reasons to suspect that in some respects the second and third sexes/genders were virtually equated. My attention is caught by the Vinaya lists of characteristics that disqualify a woman from ordination. There are various versions of this list, but most instances provide more kinds of sexual anomaly than we find in the parallel rules on male ordination. The list amounts to a description of the class of female *paṇḍakas* (even though at this point the term is but one member of the list); to wit: if she is without sexual organs, if she has defective sexual organs, if she is bloodless, or has stagnant blood, or is always dressed (*dhuva cola*), or is dripping, or is deformed (*sikharāṇī*), or a woman *paṇḍaka*, or a manlike woman (*vepurisika*), or one whose genitals are joined (*sambhinna*),<sup>70</sup> or is a hermaphrodite (*ubhatovyañjana*); in any of these cases she must be refused ordination.<sup>71</sup> In fact this list appears to be one of the most detailed elaborations of excluded sexual anomalies in the early strata of the Vinaya tradition altogether, apparently predating the fivefold *paṇḍaka* taxonomy. And it is suggestive indeed to realize that the most detailed early portrait of the anomalous sex that we have is of the anomalous-sex-as-female rather than as-male, especially when we remember that in virtually every other respect the Vinaya takes the male as the norm.

But there is an even more telling clue to add here: at least in its Pali version, this very same list of female exclusions is rehearsed elsewhere in the Vinaya code as a set of abuses to which men, on the whole, are prone to heap on any woman.<sup>72</sup> In other words, the very same portrait of

<sup>69</sup> A brief comparison of *bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇī* precepts is provided by Hirakawa (n. 2 above), pp. 38–42; also, Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *A Comparative Study of Bhikkhūṇī Pāṭi-mokkha* (Varanasi: Chaukhambha Orientalia, 1984).

<sup>70</sup> This seems to mean that her anus and vagina are joined. The term is also used for a kind of sexually inadequate male: see n. 11 above. It is also listed as an illness in *Mahāvīyutpatti*, entry no. 9514; it is the only one among the excluded sexual anomalies to be included here.

<sup>71</sup> *Cullavagga* 10.17.1; *Samantapasādikā*, p. 548. A similar list, including the "woman *paṇḍaka*" is found in Mahāsāṃghika Lokottaravāda Vinaya tradition: see Hirakawa, p. 61, but the "quasi-Prakrit-cum-Sanskrit" (Roth [n. 2 above], p. lx) version in Roth, p. 33, is quite different from the Chinese and hard to construe. A Sarvāstivāda version is found in C. M. Ridding and L. de la Vallée Poussin, "Bhikṣuṇī-karmavācānā, a Fragment of the Sanskrit Vinaya," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 1 (1917–20): 131. The various lists of female sexual anomalies are interesting and deserve further study; I have not yet located one in Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya texts, but most of the members of the list, along with many of the other *antarāyika* states, are included in *Mahāvīyutpatti*, sec. 27.

<sup>72</sup> *Suttavibhaṅga Saṃghādisesa* 3.3.1.

the sexually excluded class for monasticism also served as a disparaging portrait of women in general. But while in the first instance the monk preceptor is ritually entitled to interrogate a fledgling nun about her private parts and menstrual cycle in order to determine her eligibility for ordination, in the second context it is clear that the list of abuses refers rather to the kinds of afflictions and monstrosities that render a female an unacceptable—and also infertile—mate, hence men's tendency to ridicule such women.

Is the *paṇḍaka* then just a caricature of what the male finds unacceptable in the opposite sex?<sup>73</sup> Indeed, it is rather surprising to find concerns about procreation and female fertility reinscribed as criteria for admission to a celibate order, but perhaps it should not be too surprising, given the thoroughgoing androcentrism of the monastic code. Consider, then, one more clue that the third sex stands for the second sex in monasticism. It is in fact to be discerned in several Indic sources, but it becomes especially striking in Tibetan.<sup>74</sup> This is the very special ambiguity of the term *za ma*, often the Tibetan translation of the Indic *śaṇḍha*, one of the other words that, as already seen, names the third sex.<sup>75</sup> While all of those terms, including *paṇḍaka* itself, can refer to both a sexually abnormal male and a sexually abnormal female, *za ma* in Tibetan can additionally denote a normal female.<sup>76</sup> In this usage the term's semantic resonance implies

<sup>73</sup> Also suggesting that the *paṇḍaka* is like a potential and dangerous female sexual partner is a list of those from whom the monk may not beg for alms: prostitutes, widows, unmarried women, nuns, and *paṇḍakas*: *Mahavagga* 1.38.5. For such associations more generally in India, see Will Roscoe, "Priests of the Goddess: Gender Transgression in Ancient Religion," *History of Religion* 35 (February 1996): 195–230.

<sup>74</sup> An example in Indic sources suggesting that the third sex is like a female is the description of the *śaṇḍha* in *Suśrutasaṃhitā Śārīrasthāna* 2.41–42.

<sup>75</sup> Often, like *śaṇḍha*, *za ma* denotes a castrated male: *Mes po zhal lung*, 1:698; dGe-'dun Grub, p. 403. The *za ma* state is one of the sexual anomalies that prevents ordination: sometimes it is distinguished from *ma ning*, as in Mi-skyod rDo-rje, p. 403, but it also is often used synonymously with *ma ning*: Krang-dbyi-sun et al., eds., *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (Beijing: Mi-rigs dPe-skrun-khang, 1993; reprint, 1998), p. 2443; bTsan-lha Nga-dbang Tshul-khrims, ed., *brDa dkrol gser gyi me long* (Beijing: Mi-rigs dPe-skrun-khang, 1997), p. 792. See also *Mes po zhal lung*, 1:698, quoting Byang-pa bKra-shis dPal-bzang; here Zur-mkhar-ba corrects Byang-pa, arguing that to equate *ma ning* and *za ma* is a mistake and insisting that the *za ma* is someone who has been castrated whereas the *ma ning* is one of the three types: changing, hermaphrodite, or neuter. The passages of Byang-pa to which Zur-mkhar-ba refers are found in *dPal ldan phyi ma bgyud kyi 'brel pa rin po che'i bang mdzod dgos 'dod 'byung ba* (photocopied manuscript), pp. 300–311.

<sup>76</sup> *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, p. 2443; *bDud rtsi snying po*, p. 375; *Mes po'i zhal lung*, 2:309. Sometimes the term used is *za ma mo*, but I would argue that here *za ma* is in apposition to *mo* rather than modifying it. Sog-po Lung-rigs bsTan-dar (seventeenth century?) confirms the sense of *za ma* as specifically female by defining it as someone whose menstrual discharge comes out every month: *rGyud bzhi'i brda bkrol mnam rgyal a ru ra'i phreng ba'i mdzes rgyan* (Beijing: Mi-rigs dPe-skrun-khang, 1986), p. 296. dBang-dus, p. 529, interestingly explains the slippage by saying that although *za ma* in general refers to a castrated male or someone with diminished desire, the term has come to be a word for female, because (like a woman) such people's experience of sex is that their partners are consummated (*za ba*) when

softness, suppleness, and weakness,<sup>77</sup> and I take that to be very significant, for it names a key feature of what is wrong with both the female and the third sex, that is, wrong in the particular context of “rigid” monastic discipline. Both the second and third sex are in the end *napum-saka*, to return to the Indic medical term—that which is “not male”—but now we can see that the *paṇḍaka* is also not what the order would like the female to be either. Uncontrollability, instability, indefinability, softness, weakness: these features are common to caricatures of the second and the third sexes alike, rendering the two equally anathema to monasticism.

So why the doubling, then? Why a second second sex? Is it merely an artifact of a system of sexual discipline, a system built on the patriarchal privilege of a first sex defined against a second? Is it just such a system that calls out for a third rubric—to fill out the space in between the first two, a space that serves precisely to signal the danger of confusion and the need to patrol ever more vigilantly the borders? I am even tempted to speculate—and this is the final epiphany for now—that it was the very creation of an other to that other other that allowed the original other in through the door of ordination at all. Or in other words: I would like to suggest that the *paṇḍaka* category functioned as a scapegoat for the threat that woman was believed to pose to the monastic order. This scapegoat would have served to purify the image of woman (at least, “normal” woman) and allow her inclusion after all—even if she remained hobbled by the Eight Heavy rules.

Now if all that is the case, we can be doubly impressed by the third sex’s powers. Not only was it the proxy object of prejudice against non-conventional—that is, not fully male—sex, so that the truly discriminated sex, the second sex, could slip into an otherwise restrictive order. The foregoing theoretical speculation on a “law of the nonexcluded middle” has also revealed that this same third term ironically would work to subvert the very “order” that created it, writing slippage itself eternally into the system. And if that is true, perhaps we have really discovered some good reasons to gloss the *ma ning/paṇḍaka* as the compassionate bodhi-sattva, at least with regard to sex and gender ideals in Buddhist history. Perhaps the light that the curious third-term figure sheds on the nature of sex and gender discrimination will help the monastic community slowly to chip away at its roots, at the very moment that our global society fi-

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they experience in themselves the flavor of their desire, while they themselves are unable to arouse their own desiring organ and use it to have sex with others. In this he seems to be implying also that the *za ma* could be a male with what for dBang-'dus is a female sexual orientation.

<sup>77</sup> Thupten Phuntsok, personal communication, March 2000, Shang-Shung Institute, Conway, Mass. This resonance is reflected in the sense of the term more generally as meaning weak desire or sexual impotence.

nally begins to reckon with the daunting power that our conceptions about gender have. Indeed, those conceptions are proving to be almost as recalcitrant as ignorance and craving themselves, at the very heart of the Buddhist problematic.

*The Divinity School, Harvard University*



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Kālī's Tongue and Ramakrishna: "Biting the Tongue" of the Tantric Tradition

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Jeffrey J. Kripal

KĀLĪ'S TONGUE AND  
RAMAKRISHNA:  
“BITING THE TONGUE”  
OF THE TANTRIC  
TRADITION

The Master became quiet. Again the Master spoke: “How many more things I could say but cannot. . . . It is as if someone were holding my mouth shut! . . . Have I done something wrong? Should all of this (secret) talk have been spoken?” [*KATHĀMṚTA* 3.141]

Kālī's tongue is a problem. In one ancient Sanskrit text, it licks up the blood and semen of demons. In the Tantras, it is often described as beautiful, red with the blood of ghouls, goats, buffalo, and, sometimes, men. It hangs. It lolls. One cannot help noticing it. In the famous temple of Kālīghāt in southern Calcutta, the image of the goddess appears to be nothing but a tongue—a three-foot-long golden tongue, lolling, hanging, promising death, be it devotional or physical, to all who enjoy its vision (*darśana*). Such a death becomes more concrete when one steps out of the inner temple and into the courtyard. Here goat after goat are led to the stake and decapitated by a large Brahman with a single powerful stroke. The devotees, at first standing back to avoid the flying blood, eventually come forward into the sacrificial pit to place their own heads in the V-shaped stake as they wipe a spot of blood on their foreheads. For the historian of religions, Kālī's ancient associations with human sacrifice are eerily brought to life, and the comfortable

Many people assisted me with this article. I would especially like to thank Wendy Doniger, who commented extensively on the chapter version of this article; Rachel Fell McDermott, whose own work on Kālī's tongue I have used extensively; and Rick Shweder, who challenged me and whose work with Usha Menon delighted me.

familiarity that once surrounded the macabre image of Kālī's garland of human heads immediately dissolves.

But all of this is not a problem. Granted, the shining tongue in the temple may trouble more than a few and prick the cultured tastes of many a Calcuttan, but it is still not a problem; that is, it does not contradict itself. On the contrary, it is gruesomely consistent—the tongue consumes the blood of demons, of sacrificed animals, and of men. The problem arises when one asks the devotees themselves what Kālī's tongue means as it hangs there in the thousands of images that dot Calcutta's streets, shops, and homes. The most common image shows Kālī standing on her prostrate husband, Śiva. Sometimes Śiva is portrayed as a corpse. Sometimes he gazes up at the goddess with devotion and love. In a few images, his penis stands erect. Kālī wears a garland of heads and a bikini-skirt of human hands. Her two right hands offer boons and promise freedom from fear. Her two left hands hold a threatening sword and a lopped-off human head. Her breasts are often bare and usually full. Jackals and snakes often can be found hovering around the strange couple. The goddess's tongue is sticking out.

If one asks Kālī's devotees about this last feature, they inevitably answer that the goddess is sticking out her tongue *in shame*. The goddess, they quickly point out, is standing on her husband, Śiva. This is considered improper in the culture—indeed, wildly improper. Bengali wives, after all, do not normally stand on top of their husbands. The goddess responds to her improper act like a good Bengali housewife: she sticks her tongue out, as Bengalis themselves do, to express a sense of shame. Actually, however, Bengalis do not stick their tongues out to express shame. It is more of a biting of the tongue, a slight extension as the teeth bite or “cut” (*kāṭā*) it—not unlike the English expression, “Bite your tongue!” But no one seems to notice the conflation here. Never mind Kālī's cannibalistic history in Hindu mythology. Never mind her unabashed eroticism in the Tantras and their rituals. Never mind that her tongue often hangs down well past her chin, way past any cultural cue of embarrassed shame: one text has it extending nine miles!<sup>1</sup> All that history and all those texts are forgotten now. Now she is supposed to be ashamed, embarrassed by her improper acts.

I find this shamed tongue fascinating, not so much because it is such a prominent theme in contemporary Bengali interpretations of Kālī, but more especially because it is virtually absent in the Purāṇas and Tantras

<sup>1</sup> According to the Skanda Purāṇa; this is stated but not referenced in D. R. Rajeshwari's *Sakti Iconography* (New Delhi: Intellectual, 1989), p. 61, and referenced in Rachel Fell McDermott's “Kālī's Tongue: Historical Re-interpretations of the Blood-lusting Goddess” (paper presented at the Mid-Atlantic Regional Conference of the American Academy of Religion, Barnard College, New York, March 21, 1991), p. 8.

that form the textual and ritual base of the tradition. This, I would argue, signals something important in the culture. Contradictions, after all, often point to hidden truths. They suggest that there may be more to a particular cultural form than the culture itself is often willing to acknowledge openly. My own work on the nineteenth-century Bengali saint, Ramakrishna, has led me to a very similar conclusion; for the Ramakrishna that I have uncovered in the historical record is in many ways not the Ramakrishna that contemporary Bengali culture acknowledges as its own. Ramakrishna, in other words, very much like Kālī's tongue, is a problem for Bengali culture and, as I will show shortly, for many of the same reasons. I have thus found the problem of Kālī's tongue to be an especially effective means to get at the problem of Ramakrishna. In the next few pages, then, I want to discuss the movements of that tongue and that saint as they manifest themselves in three Bengali texts: Ram Chandra Datta's *Śrīśrīrāmakṣṇa Paramahansa-dever Jivanavṛttānta* (1890) or *Jivanavṛttānta*,<sup>2</sup> the earliest major biography of the saint, which is still untranslated; Mahendranath Gupta's *Śrīśrīrāmakṣṇakathāmṛta* (1902–32),<sup>3</sup> a five-volume recording of Ramakrishna's visions and teachings, which is known to Bengalis simply as the *Kathāmṛta* and to English readers as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*;<sup>4</sup> and Swami Saradananda's *Śrīśrīrāmakṣṇalīlāprasaṅga* (1912–17),<sup>5</sup> a much later but more canonical biography, known to Bengalis as the *Līlāprasaṅga* and to English readers as *The Great Master*.<sup>6</sup>

Because I am taking Kālī's tongue as the organizing metaphor of the study, I will begin with a brief history of that tongue in Hindu mythology, philosophy, and ritual. I will then turn to the texts of Datta, Gupta, and Saradananda and analyze the meanings of the extended tongue in the secret visions and ecstatic acts of Ramakrishna. Very briefly, I will demonstrate that, whereas in the public culture the extended tongue is said to be an expression of shame, in the secret world of Ramakrishna's visions and ecstatic states it is extended to commune with the disgusting and the impure. Shame and disgust thus define the lolling tongue. I

<sup>2</sup> Ram Chandra Datta, *Śrīśrīrāmakṣṇa Paramahāṁsadever Jivanavṛttānta*, 5th ed. (Calcutta: Yogadyana, 1935) (hereafter cited as JV). All translations from the Bengali or Sanskrit are my own unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> I am using the thirty-first edition of the Kathamrita Bhavana five-volume set: Mahendranath Gupta, *Śrīśrīrāmakṣṇakathāmṛta*, 31st ed. (Calcutta: Kathamrita Bhavana, 1987) (hereafter cited as KA, followed by the volume and page number; e.g., KA 1.54 references vol. 1, p. 54).

<sup>4</sup> Swami Nikhilananda, trans., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> Swami Saradananda, *Śrīśrīrāmakṣṇalīlāprasaṅga* (Calcutta: Udbodhana Karyalaya, 1986) (hereafter cited as LP, followed by the book, chapter, and paragraph numbers).

<sup>6</sup> Swami Jagananda, trans., *Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master*, 5th ed. (Mylapore: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1978).

will argue, moreover, that it is Tantra and its ritual of the Five M's that structure and give meaning to these acts of Ramakrishna's Kālī-like tongue. In the secret life of Ramakrishna, the saint's tongue is a Tantric tongue, and, because it is obviously neither ashamed nor embarrassed, it is, much like Kālī's tongue, a "problem" for the culture.

The article is based on the assumption that these specific problems of Kālī's tongue and Ramakrishna's tongue are emblematic of the more general problem of Tantra in Bengali culture. In the last section of the essay, I want to address this larger problem of Tantra by analyzing the various strategies of censorship, distortion, and silence that are employed in the texts of Datta, Gupta, and Saradananda to cover up and hide the troublingly shameless passages that they themselves contain. The texts' structures and histories, I will argue, are defined by complex patterns of revealing and concealing that reproduce on a textual level the ambivalence Bengalis feel about Tantra in general. Much like Kālī's tongue, the texts boldly express the mystico-erotic nature of Ramakrishna's Tantric experiences only to end up "biting" themselves in internal acts of cultural shame, shocked by the secrets that they themselves have revealed and recorded for posterity.

#### 1. KĀLĪ'S TONGUE IN INDIAN HISTORY

The history of Kālī's tongue, like the history of the goddess herself, is a story rich in detail but poor in plot. We know a great deal about what the tongue symbolized in specific texts at different periods, but we know very little about how, why, or when the different meanings of the tongue developed. As with the story of the Indian goddesses themselves, "only in very general terms is there a discernible historical progress."<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the work of different scholars has resulted in something of a consensus in a very general history of Kālī and her lolling tongue.<sup>8</sup> Such a history can be divided into four broad stages: the tongue as consumer of blood sacrifices in tribal culture; the tongue as consumer of demons in classical Hinduism; the Tantric tongue in medieval Hinduism; and, finally, the tongue as an emblem of embarrassment or shame in modern-day India. These stages are at best preliminary hermeneutical devices

<sup>7</sup> David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> I am deeply indebted here to the work of David Kinsley, whose *The Sword and the Flute: Kālī and Kṛṣṇa: Dark Visions of the Terrible and the Sublime in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975) first set out a general and, I think, generally correct historical understanding of Kālī, at least as she has been worshiped in Bengal. McDermott, in her "Evidence for the Transformation of the Goddess Kālī: Kamalākānta Bhāṭṭācārya and the Bengali Śākta Padāvali Tradition" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1993) has recently revised and deepened Kinsley's original insights into the domestication and "sweetening" of Kālī through a profound study of the Kālī *bhakta* and poet, Kamalākānta. I draw heavily on the work of both of these scholars.

designed to place the discussion that follows in a broad historical context. They argue not so much for some sort of historical precision, which they do not claim, but for the importance of historical development and change in analyzing the complexity and internal conflict inherent in many religious forms. Moreover, these stages should not be understood as mutually exclusive of one another. Like most religious forms built up over time, Kālī's tongue never truly sheds any of its earlier meanings. Preserved in myth, ritual, and iconography, these different layered meanings are always potential realities for those capable of tapping into their latent power. As we shall see shortly, it is precisely this historical process of layering and this ever-present latency that produces what I have called the problem of Kālī's tongue.

TRIBAL ORIGINS: "THAT SONTHAL BITCH"

Most scholars now agree that Kālī originated in the mountain tribal societies of South Asia, where she, or some variant of her form, seems to have been worshiped with blood sacrifice and fertility rituals. In these contexts, Kālī's tongue seems to have functioned primarily as a consumer of blood and, if we are to believe the reports (which were often explicitly polemical or embedded in literary works), of human sacrifice. Kālī here is a goddess of outsiders, of the peripheries of Hindu culture. She dwells in the mountains and on the geographic extremities of Hindu India (e.g., in Assam). She is black skinned, like the tribal aboriginal peoples of the mountains who worshiped her. Perhaps one of Ramakrishna's disciples summed up this troubling history best when he capitalized on Kālī's popularity among the Sonthal tribes and jokingly referred to her as "that Sonthal bitch."<sup>9</sup>

THE EARLY SANSKRIT LITERATURE: LONG-TONGUE, FIRE AND FURY

The Kālī of the early Sanskrit literature is no less fantastic than the postulated Kālī of the tribal peoples and does little to ennoble her image. Consider, for example, the demoness Long-Tongue (*Dirghajihvī*) of the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, a figure whom O'Flaherty has identified as a precursor of the later, equally long-tongued Kālī.<sup>10</sup> Long-Tongue licks up the juice (*soma*) of the Vedic ritual and has "mice" (vaginas) all over her body. She is slain through a trick whereby the god Indra grants a certain Sumitra penises on every limb. Sumitra lies down with the demoness and locks into her so that Indra can cut her down. Long-Tongue, she who licked up the ritual juice and had vaginas "on every limb," was

<sup>9</sup> KA 1.235, 1.236, and 4.267.

<sup>10</sup> Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Tales of Sex and Violence: Folklore, Sacrifice, and Danger in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), pp. 101–3.

thus slain.<sup>11</sup> In this story, the demoness's tongue illicitly licks up the sacrificial offerings that belong rightly to the gods and seems to be connected, however symbolically, to an overly aggressive female sexuality: the unusual length of her tongue seems to mirror the exaggerated number of her "mice." The sacrificial theme, if not the sexual one, appears again in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (ca. fifth century B.C.E.) but this time rights itself back to a more proper meaning. Here for the first time we come across the name "Kālī." It refers, however, not to a goddess, but to one of the seven tonguelike flames of the sacrificial fire: "The seven licking tongues are the Black (*kālī*), the Terrible, the Swift as Mind, the Red, the Smoky, the Spark and the Goddess of the Universal Form."<sup>12</sup> Long-Tongue's tongue, once the aggressor, has become part of the sacred fire. As McDermott has pointed out, this motif of the fiery tongue consuming the sacrifice is central to the later history of Kālī.<sup>13</sup> We will see it again when we turn to the visions of Ramakrishna. The *Muṇḍaka* passage, however, still contains no clear reference to a goddess. For that we have to turn to the *Mahābhārata*, where a dark goddess named Kālī appears in the dreams of the camped Paṇḍava warriors to warn them of their own imminent deaths.<sup>14</sup> The sleeping warriors see her black, bloody form leading them away with a noose.

In these passages, a Kālī-like goddess (Long-Tongue) or a goddess named Kālī is still a figure on the very periphery of Indian society and consciousness. She threatens to destroy the sacrifice. She challenges the Vedic gods with the dangers of multiple sexual organs. She appears in dreams to lead the Paṇḍava warriors away to their death. Kālī and her blood-hungry tongue are brought a bit closer to Hindu society with the appearance of the sixth-century C.E. Sanskrit text, the *Devīmāhātmya*, an approximately 700-line battle hymn reciting the glorious battles of the goddess Durgā against the forces of evil. In the course of the hymn, Kālī assists Durgā twice, once to slay the demons Canda and Muṇḍa and once to slay Raktabīja, "he whose blood is semen." In the first scene, Durgā's forehead darkens to an inky black, and out of this dark anger appears a horribly emaciated Kālī, armed with a sword and

<sup>11</sup> Although it is not directly related to the topic of tongues, I should point out that elements of this myth reappear again in the *Kathāmṛta*. Consider, e.g., the following passage: "Gauri used to say that when the Great Love (*mahābhāva*) occurs, all the holes of the body—down to the hairpores—become great vaginas. In each and every hole, one experiences the pleasure of sex with the Self" (*KA* 4.36). Ramakrishna, willing or not, sanctifies Long-Tongue's multiple "mice" by employing them in the pansomatic orgasm of mystical experience. He harnesses, in a typically Tantric way, the dangerous and employs it *within* his religious experience.

<sup>12</sup> *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.4, in V. Sadanand, ed., *Śrīśaṅkaragranthāvaliḥ*, vol. 8 (Madras: Samata, 1983).

<sup>13</sup> McDermott, "Kālī's Tongue," p. 3. (n. 1 above).

<sup>14</sup> *Saṁpīka Parva* 8.65–68, cited in McDermott's "Kālī's Tongue," p. 3.

a noose, “with gaping mouth and fearful with her lolling tongue.”<sup>15</sup> Kālī devours the elephants of the demon army and lops off the heads of Canda and Muṇḍa to present to Durgā. The demon leader now decides to march with all of his army to battle the stubborn goddess and her inky companion. Amidst the battle, the demon Raktabīja proves to be particularly powerful, for every time he is cut down in battle each of his semen-like drops of blood (*raktabīja*) springs into an equally powerful Raktabīja. Soon there are thousands of him. But Durgā simply commands Kālī to open her mouth wide and gulp down the drops as Durgā herself slays the demon: “Stricken with many weapons, the great demon Raktabīja fell to the ground bloodless.”<sup>16</sup> The male demon's vital forces were thus consumed by a devouring female.

In both of these scenes, we see Kālī's tongue and huge gaping mouth employed to consume not a human sacrifice, but a demonic army. Her terrible violence has been harnessed for the good of the world. She still retains her dark bloodthirsty nature, but her darkness is now an angry aspect of the Great Goddess. Kālī and her tongue have entered the Hindu fold—if only as an incarnation of fury and as a consumer of demonic blood and semen.

#### THE TANTRIC TONGUE: BLOOD AND PASSION

The Tantric texts preserve these earlier meanings of wild bloodthirst, sacrifice, and battle, although the descriptions now become somewhat stylized. Kālī's face is thus commonly described as “smiling with two streams of blood oozing from the corners of her mouth.”<sup>17</sup> Her mouth is still said to be gaping, its huge teeth protruding, smeared with blood. Her lolling tongue (*lolajihvā*) is yet a marker of horror and fear. As a symbolic equivalent of the goddess's terrible sharp sword,<sup>18</sup> her tongue is worshiped as a means to engorge the goddess with blood. Thus, the *Kālikā Purāṇa* enjoins the worshiper to purify the sacrificial sword with these words: “Thou art Caṇḍikā's tongue; thou leadest me into the world of the gods.”<sup>19</sup> The deadly tonguelike sword, it seems, is still aimed, not just at the sacrifice, but at the human worshiper as well. Violence, even if it has been purified with devotion (*bhakti*), is still very much a part

<sup>15</sup> *Devī-Māhātmya* 7.9. I am using the Sanskrit/English edition of the Ramakrishna Math (Swami Jagadiswarananda, trans., *Devī Mahatmyam* [Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1953]); the translations are mine.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 8.62.

<sup>17</sup> *Kālī-Tantra* 1.32, in Srinityananda Smrititirtha, ed. and trans., *Kālī-Tantra* (Calcutta: Navabharata, 1982).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28 (Smrititirtha's Bengali commentary on the *Kālī-Tantra*).

<sup>19</sup> *Kālikā Purāṇa* 57.13–14, in Van Kooij, trans., *The Worship of the Goddess according to the Kālikā Purāṇa* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), p. 53; cited in McDermott's “Kālī's Tongue,” p. 6.

of her worship. Thus, the goddess is said to be greatly satisfied with the flesh of both animals and men: "cats, camels, sheep, buffalo, goats and men,"<sup>20</sup> as one list goes. Another text describes the "skull seat" of Tantric ritual: five skulls from five different creatures, including a man, must be collected and arranged just so.<sup>21</sup> Kālī's alleged origins in the sacrifices of the tribal peoples are still very apparent.

But there are developments as well in the Tantras, for the texts describe aspects of Kālī and her tongue that were not so apparent in the earlier traditions. In the Tantras, for example, Kālī is a Great Goddess in her own right and not simply an emotional appendage of Durgā. Moreover, she is now joined to Śiva, one of the major deities of the Hindu pantheon, erotically engaging the god in reversed sexual intercourse (*viparītarati*). This upside-down erotic act takes on cosmic proportions when the philosophical tradition of Sāṃkhya is employed to interpret the union of the goddess and the god: the goddess as Primordial Nature (*prakṛti*) unites with the Eternal Spirit (*puruṣa*) to create all that is, the texts and commentaries now state. By the time of the Tantras, such philosophical interpretations have entered deeply into Kālī's nature and have transformed even her tongue. Consider, for example, one commentator's gloss on a verse describing the goddess's gaping mouth: "Her white teeth are indicative of the white self-manifesting quality of Purity biting the red lolling tongue, which indicates the quality of Passion, thus suppressing both Passion and Darkness by Purity."<sup>22</sup> The tongue that once licked the blood of human heads in ritual and consumed demons by the thousands in the myths is, thus, almost lost in a world of philosophical abstractions.

What does Kālī's tongue mean in the Tantras? Many things, no doubt. It is a consumer of blood sacrifice, a provoker of horror, even a philosophical category. Perhaps it also signified the goddess's erotic arousal. There is little textual evidence to support such a theory, but there are hints. The tongue, after all, is commonly associated with the category of passion (*rajas*) and is extended while Kālī engages Śiva in aggressive intercourse. In Hindu mythology, moreover, the female sexual organ can become "teethed."<sup>23</sup> And there are later texts in the culture in which both the mouth and the tongue become sexual organs. For

<sup>20</sup> *Karpūrādistotram*, v. 19, in Swami Vimalananda, *Karpūrādistotram*, ed. and trans. John Woodroffe (Calcutta: Sanskrit Press Depository, 1922).

<sup>21</sup> See *LP* (note 5 above) 2.11.6 and Saradananda's footnote on the *Yoginī Tantra*.

<sup>22</sup> Vimalananda's Sanskrit commentary on the *Karpūrādistotram*, p. 38.

<sup>23</sup> The demon, Ādi, once took the form of Śiva's consort, Parvatī, and "placed hard teeth like thunderbolts with sharp tips inside the vagina." Śiva, however, recognizing the form as an illusion, placed a "dangerous weapon" on his phallus and "satisfied the demon's desire. . . . The demon screamed terrible screams and died" (O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths* [Middlesex: Penguin, 1984], p. 257).



example, as we shall see below, a woman once used her mouth to sexually suck Ramakrishna's "big toe."<sup>24</sup> Finally, I might add here that, in a secret passage in volume 4 of the *Kathāmṛta*, Ramakrishna sees the goddess's "cosmic vagina" (*brahmayoni*) "lolling,"<sup>25</sup> the same expression that is often used to describe Kālī's tongue. Clearly, then, there are numerous symbolic cues that could give an erotic meaning to Kālī's gaping mouth and its bloody red tongue.

#### THE TONGUE OF SHAME

But more important than such acts, visions, and myths in uncovering the erotic dimensions of Kālī's tongue is the profound reversal or denial that takes place in respect to the tongue and its meaning in contemporary Bengali culture. Kālī's tongue, we must remember, is said now to represent the goddess's sense of shame for "standing" on her husband. The Tantras are clear enough about why Kālī is standing on Śiva: she is engaging him in "reversed sexual intercourse" (*viparītarati*), delighting in the waves of passion and arousal that flow from such an act: *mahākaleṇa ca samam viparītaratātūrām*: "and she delights in reversed sexual intercourse with Śiva," as one text puts it.<sup>26</sup> There is no shame here. If Kālī, then, is said now to be ashamed for standing on Śiva, and the Tantras state that Kālī is standing on Śiva to engage him in an upside-down erotic act, then it seems clear, *at least from a Tantric perspective*, that the shame the culture sees in Kālī's extended tongue is, quite simply, misplaced. It is not there.

Misplaced or not, however, it is precisely this shamed tongue that becomes Kālī's tongue in the modern period. If one asks people on the streets of Calcutta why Kālī is sticking out her tongue, this "shamed tongue" answer is precisely the explanation that will most often be given. In a fascinating piece of research, Usha Menon and Richard Shweder have recently established this "culturally correct" interpretation of Kālī's tongue in contemporary Orissa.<sup>27</sup> But there are important dissenters in Menon and Shweder's study, foremost among them two Tāntrikas. In a second article Menon and Shweder also quote a third source, the story of P. C. Mishra, an Oriya narrator Frédérique Marglin interviewed in Puri, to further amplify this Tantric reading of Kālī's tongue. According to Mishra, Durgā became furious when she learned that, due to a boon the gods had granted the buffalo demon, she could kill him only by exposing her genitals in front of him. After exposing

<sup>24</sup> *JV* (n. 2 above), p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> *KA* (n. 3 above) 4.232.

<sup>26</sup> Nityananda's commentary on the *Kālī-Tantra* (in Smṛititirtha, ed., p. 31).

<sup>27</sup> Usha Menon and Richard A. Shweder, "Kālī's Tongue: Cultural Psychology and the Power of 'Shame' in Orissa, India," in *Culture and the Emotions*, ed. Hazel Markus and Shinobu Kitayama (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1994), p. 241–84.

herself and slaying the buffalo demon, the goddess goes on a wild rampage, so upset is she about being humiliated by the male gods:

Her anger grew so terrible that she transformed herself, grew smaller and black and left her lion mount and started walking on foot. Her name then became Kali. With tongue lolling out and dripping with blood, she then went on a blind destructive rampage, killing everything and everyone in sight, regardless of who they were. The gods and the people became extremely worried and appealed to Siva for help. Mahadev agreed and lay himself down, sleeping on the path on which the furious, black and naked Kali was coming. In her blinded anger she did not see him and stepped on his chest. At that moment Siva's penis became erect and entered Kali. At that instant Kali recognized her husband and pulled out her tongue in ecstasy and her anger disappeared.<sup>28</sup>

Here Kālī's tongue retains its Tantric nature. It is a marker of erotic ecstasy, not of shame. It extends itself as Śiva's penis becomes erect, as if to signal that it, too, is a sexual organ capable of arousal. The story thus reverses the "culturally correct" version of the myth and returns the icon of Kālī "standing" on Śiva back to its earlier Tantric meanings.

But P. C. Mishra's story is the exception. Indeed, so rare is his account of Kālī's tongue that an interpretation such as his would turn up on Menon and Shweder's statistical scale as a "cultural dud."<sup>29</sup> Although Mishra most likely speaks of the earlier Tantric intent of the icon, he nevertheless appears as wildly heterodox, as "wrong." Kālī's tongue, then, has reversed itself from a sexually aggressive organ of wild proportions to a marker of feminine modesty. Sumitra's ancient act of slaying the sexually aggressive Long-Tongue has been reenacted in the culture. In the words of Vivekananda, Ramakrishna's most famous disciple, Śiva has finally reclaimed his rightful dominance over the goddess and made her a "servant" (*dāsi*).<sup>30</sup>

But has he? As Menon and Shweder point out, narrators commenting on the manner in which the goddess returns to her wifely senses usually insist that she does so entirely of her own accord. She could stamp Śiva into the ground if she wished, but instead she chooses to reign her power in and control her justified anger in an act of public "shame." Menon and Shweder articulate some of the implications of this self-imposed shame: "The ultimate message of the icon, therefore, is to display the cultural 'truth' that it is women who uphold the social order. . . . Curiously enough, this view of women coincides with the Tantric one that

<sup>28</sup> F. A. Marglin, *Wives of the God-King* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 214–15; quoted in Richard A. Shweder and Usha Menon, "The Story of Kali's 'Shame' and the Authority of 'Original Texts'; or, Tales That You Can Find in the Puranas Which Aren't Really There" (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>29</sup> Menon and Shweder, p. 271.

<sup>30</sup> KA 4.296.

also sees women as the power that upholds the universe. The difference is that while the Tantric view sees women achieving this position through the unchecked exercise of power, the narrators in the sample see it as being attained through the moral self-control of such power."<sup>31</sup> Paradoxically, then, even in the culture's denial of the explicitly Tantric meanings of Kālī's tongue (the tongue as a marker of sexual aggression and arousal) the culture ultimately returns to Tantra and its divinization of feminine power. The shy housewife, biting her tongue in a public act of restraint, controls by that act an immense reservoir of power capable, at any moment, of dissolving what Ramakrishna called the "bonds of shame, disgust and fear"<sup>32</sup> and of returning the culture to that Tantric midnight "where all jackals howl in the same way."<sup>33</sup>

## 2. KĀLĪ'S TONGUE IN THE TEXTS

This ever-present possibility of returning to the Tantric meanings of Kālī's iconographic form and the dissolution of the social conditionings or "bonds" that such meanings speak of is in fact realized in the secret life of Ramakrishna; for here what McDermott has called Kālī's "difficult background,"<sup>34</sup> denied by the culture in its nervous interpretation of Kālī's tongue as an emblem of controlled anger and shame, returns with a vengeance as if to remind the public culture of its own more radical meanings. It is as if Ramakrishna functioned as a revealer of the culture's unconscious history, returning the icons of his religion back to their ancient origins. Take, for example, the nature of Śiva's famous *liṅgam*, widely regarded by historians as a phallic symbol. Traditional interpreters, no doubt offended by the findings of the historians, have countered with the argument that Śiva's *liṅgam* is simply an abstract symbol of the godhead, despite the fact that Śiva does all sorts of phallic things with it in the texts of the tradition. The argument against a phallic interpretation usually begins by ignoring such texts, despite the fact that there are hundreds of them, and proceeds to point out the fact that many modern Hindus are completely unaware of the *liṅgam*'s history and sexual connotations. For them, it is argued, the phallus is not there.

Perhaps, but such was certainly not the case for Ramakrishna, who prayed to the "Place of the Father" (the *liṅgam*) and the "Place of the Mother" (the *yonī*) not to be born again<sup>35</sup> and worshiped his own penis as Śiva's "Living Liṅgam," teasing a precious "pearl" of seminal fluid

<sup>31</sup> Menon and Shweder, p. 278.

<sup>32</sup> KA 1.247, 3.31, and 4.28. See also *ibid.* 1.214, 4.208, and 5.51 for an expanded list of eight bonds. *Ibid.* 4.99 lists *gopāner icchā* (desire for secrets) as the sixth bond.

<sup>33</sup> LP (n. 5 above) 4.4.30.

<sup>34</sup> McDermott, "Kālī's Tongue" (n. 1 above), p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> KA 2.155.

out of it. In volume 4 of the *Kathāmṛta*, the saint speaks of this unusual worship: “The Paramahansa’s state of madness also used to come [upon me]. I would become mad and worship my own penis with the awareness that it was Śiva’s penis. This is called the Worship of the Living Liṅgam (*jīvantaliṅgapūjā*). And a little pearl would come out! Now I’m not able to do that.”<sup>36</sup> It would be difficult to convince a witness of this scene that Śiva’s *liṅgam* does not possess an unmistakable phallic dimension. Ramakrishna knew quite well that a *liṅgam* was much more than an abstract symbol of divinity. He was aware of the *liṅgam*’s history and could access its mystico-erotic meanings in ecstatic states and symbolic discourse.

A similar pattern of public denial and secret or ecstatic affirmation can be seen in the appropriation of Kālī’s tongue. It expresses the shame the goddess feels for standing on Śiva, the culture now claims as it forgets the Tantric past of its own icon. Ramakrishna corrects this “culturally correct” reading as well, returning the tongue back to its Tantric meanings: “In the Śiva-Kālī image Kālī is standing on Śiva. Śiva has become a corpse. Kālī gazes at Śiva. All of this speaks of the union of the Cosmic Man and the Cosmic Woman (*puruṣa-prakṛtir yoga*).”<sup>37</sup> The goddess’s upside-down erotic act for Ramakrishna is no shameful act; rather, it is a cosmic truth, expressive of the deepest meanings of the universe. In another passage, this one listed as “secret talk” (*guhya kathā*), Ramakrishna actually “sees” this mystico-erotic union in a vision: “One day it was shown to me that *Śiva and Śakti* are everywhere. The love-making of Śiva and Śakti. Man, creatures, trees—in everything I saw this Śiva and Śakti, the Cosmic Man and the Cosmic Woman! In everything I saw their love-making.”<sup>38</sup> Again, there is no mention of shame here. There is only a cosmic eroticism, defined by a Sāṃkhya-inspired Tantra. Such a shameless eroticism appears again in the Śākta songs that pepper the *Kathāmṛta*. Consider, for example, the following song of the great Śākta poet, Ramprasad, sung by Ramakrishna himself: “She is immersed in sexual delight on top of her lover. He trembles as he tries to hold the weight of her feet. / Both seem mad. They know no fear, they know no shame.”<sup>39</sup> “They know no shame.” But Nikhilananda, the translator of the text, certainly did. Despite the fact that this line occurs numerous times in Gupta’s *Kathāmṛta*, it appears nowhere in Nikhilananda’s English translation. Once again, the culture objects to Kālī’s standing on top

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 4.106. In his English translation, Nikhilananda omits the phrase “and a little pearl would come out!” to hide the fact that Ramakrishna’s penis (*liṅgam*) was erect and aroused in such a state (Nikhilananda [n. 4 above], p. 491).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 1.93–94.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 4.56; the italicized words are boldface in the Bengali edition.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 1.196. See also *ibid.* 2.35 and 2.146.

of Śiva. This time, however, it responds, not by projecting its own embarrassment onto Kālī but with a simple, and probably more effective, strategy of silence and omission.

In the *Kathāmṛta*, then, we have a Kālī who shamelessly engages Śiva in reversed sexual intercourse in the animals and trees of the cosmos. Her tongue is nowhere mentioned as an emblem of shame for this seemingly illicit act. It does, however, appear in the texts, but always “secretly” in the visions and ecstatic acts of Ramakrishna. In many of these secret experiences, the tongue is associated with Kālī, either because Ramakrishna is possessed by the goddess within the experience or because the symbolism of the experience is Śākta and so is related to the goddess. In such passages, the tongue—be it Ramakrishna's or Kālī's—reaches out, not to express a sense of shame, but to transgress and transcend the feeling of disgust. It reaches out to commune with the disgusting, to taste it, to touch it, even to have sex with it. This is a tongue that is not ashamed of its Tantric past. On the contrary, it revels in it.

#### FLESH, FISH, AND WINE

Consider, for example, the scene in Saradananda's *Lilāprasaṅga* where the biographer explains how Ramakrishna at first felt great “disgust” (*ghṛṇā*) when the Bhairavī (the saint's female Tantric guru) asked him to touch his tongue to a piece of rotting human flesh. At first Ramakrishna could not obey, but then he had a vision of “the terrible form of the Mother,” that is, of Kālī, and entered into an ecstatic state. He could then touch his tongue to this human “meat” and feel no disgust.<sup>40</sup> This act, essentially a form of cannibalism, was most likely performed in imitation of Kālī. The human corpse is central to the Tantras. Kālī stands on it. Kālī has intercourse with it. The *sādhaka* meditates on it. The *sādhaka* breathes into its mouth in an attempt to magically awaken it back to life. And, as we have seen, the *sādhaka* consumes it. Often the corpse and the cremation ground are associated with human sexuality. The cremation ground is both the place of erotic ritual and the place where all desires are burnt away with the body. This textual connection between corpses and human desire carries over into Ramakrishna's teachings, where the corpse pit is often associated with “Lover-and-Gold” (*kāminī-kāñcana*), those two great obstacles on the road to God. Ramakrishna, for instance, continuously ridicules the scholar as a mere vulture whose thoughts soar high above the ground but only to look for the rotting pleasures of the carrion pit.<sup>41</sup> In a similar vein, he compares a woman's body to corpse ash, an impermanent,

<sup>40</sup> LP 2.11.9.

<sup>41</sup> KA 1.143, 1.195, 3.5, 3.59, 5.220.

ultimately false object for human desire.<sup>42</sup> All of these themes meet in Ramakrishna's consumption of the corpse flesh. By forcing him to eat human flesh, the Bhairavī tried to push Ramakrishna beyond the fear, the shame, and the impurity that his culture attached to *māṃsa*, or "meat," the bearer of sexuality and the abode of death.

Saradananda also tells us that Ramakrishna ate a piece of fish cooked in the skull of a dead body.<sup>43</sup> Unlike the consumption of corpses, however, eating fish is not a particularly troublesome thing in Bengal. On the contrary, Bengalis are known for their love of fish. Accordingly, Ramakrishna often compared his religious eclecticism to the Bengali mother who knows how to curry fish five different ways, which pleases everyone in her family.<sup>44</sup> Fish is, thus, central to the culture. It certainly is not a particularly disgusting substance. But fish cooked in the skull of a dead body, of course, is another matter. Even the purest of foods cooked in such a bony pot become immediately defiled.

Wine also figures heavily in the texts as an object of Ramakrishna's tongue. There was something sacred about this eminently Tantric liquid for Ramakrishna. The very sound of the word *kāraṇa* (wine), we are often told, sent Ramakrishna into *samādhi*, as did the word *yonī* (vagina).<sup>45</sup> We also are told that Ramakrishna once noted that he desired to salute Tāntrikas drinking wine on the eighth day of Durgā-pūjā.<sup>46</sup> Wine (*kāraṇa*) is sacred, then, a sacrament to remind the adept of the bliss of the "Cause of the Universe" (*kāraṇa*). But there was also something scandalous about it. Ramakrishna, for example, often noted with a certain disgust that Achalananda, a local Tāntrika, drank too much.<sup>47</sup> He also liked to tell the story about a group of Tāntrikas he met up with in Benares: much to Ramakrishna's dismay, they broke their circle of meditation to drink wine and to dance on the bank of the river.<sup>48</sup> This ambivalence toward wine is especially evident in Ramakrishna's inability to drink it.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, he could not even touch a bottle of the liquid.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 4.28.

<sup>43</sup> LP 2.11.8.

<sup>44</sup> KA 1.222, 2.15.

<sup>45</sup> LP 4.2.21. Saradananda sees this as proof of Ramakrishna's "divine state" (*divya-bhāva*) as opposed to the lower "hero state" (*vīra-bhāva*) of the Bhairavī (ibid. 3.8.20). Others, mostly Tāntrikas, however, saw such behavior as evidence of Ramakrishna's beginner's status; for them, such ecstasies were more defensive strategies than genuine Tantric experiences of the mystical in the impure (KA 2.89).

<sup>46</sup> KA 2.129.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 5.180. It was also Achalananda, among others, who criticized Ramakrishna for neglecting Tantric practice with a woman. In his typical style, Saradananda cleans things up by claiming that this same Achalananda never drank too much and always behaved properly! (LP 4.2.20).

<sup>48</sup> KA 2.143, 5.180.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 2.143.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 2.131.

All he could manage to do was to touch his tongue with a drop of it, smell it or rub it on his forehead, lest he offend Kālī.<sup>51</sup> Wine, then, is an eminently Tantric fluid for Ramakrishna, powerfully sacred and yet troublingly impure. Ramakrishna consumes it, but barely, with a mere touch of the tongue.

"DISCRIMINATING WITH SANDAL-PASTE AND FECES"

We see a similar pattern of hesitant communion through the tongue in a related set of passages in Datta's *Jivanavṛttānta* and Gupta's *Kathāmṛta*. We might recall that Kālī, at least as a name, began her textual history with a fiery tongue in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*. A similar tongue can be found in the *Kathāmṛta*. Once again, it is associated with the goddess, or in Ramakrishna's language, with "Ma." Consider, for example, another "secret" passage in volume 3 of the *Kathāmṛta*. "This is very secret talk," the Master proclaims. He then hesitates as if prevented from speaking—"How many more things I could say but cannot. . . . It is as if someone were holding my mouth shut"—and then goes on to reveal another series of secrets: "I used to see no difference between the sacred tulsi tree and the horse-radish. She pushed the distinguishing mind far away. I was meditating under the banyan-tree when a bearded Muslim (Muhammad) was shown to me. He came before me with some rice in an earthen plate. From the plate he fed some foreigners and gave me a little bit. Ma showed me that without One there is not Two. Saccidānanda takes on various forms. It itself has become all things, all living beings, the entire world. It itself has become food."<sup>52</sup> A bearded Muslim (an unclean source of food for a Brahman) approaches the saint in a vision and offers him and some foreigners (*mleccha*) the same rice. All share the same food, an act which for Ramakrishna points to an ontological truth: "without One there is not Two." Reality, he seems to say, does not share society's dualistic categories of caste and purity.

This same scene is told again in an earlier passage in the same volume, but this time the account is glossed with another vision, this one of a lolling tongue of flame:

One day I saw that *Consciousness is one—nondifferent*. At first it was shown to me that there were many people and animals—within that there were babus, Englishmen, Muslims, myself, a cremator and dogs. Moreover, a bearded Muslim man was standing there with a plate in his hand. In it was some rice. He gave the mouths of everyone a little of this rice from the plate. I also tasted a little. And another day it was shown to me—feces, pee, food, and cooked

<sup>51</sup> JV (no. 2 above), p. 31; LP 4.2.20, 4.2.21.

<sup>52</sup> KA 3.141.

dishes—all sorts of food. All were lying there. Suddenly from within [me] the personal soul came out and tasted all of these things as if it were a tongue of flame. It was as if a lolling tongue was tasting all these things! Feces, pee—it tasted everything! It was shown to me that *all things are one—nondifferent*.<sup>53</sup>

Rich babus (Bengali aristocrats), the hated English, unclean Muslims, a cremator, and some dogs—the visionary crowd is constructed out of the cultural elite, foreign imperialists, a non-Hindu, impurity, and defilement—all radical “others” for Ramakrishna. The Muslim man distributes the same unifying rice, again pointing to an emboldened philosophical revelation: “*Consciousness is one—nondifferent*.” Ramakrishna then immediately relates another vision, apparently because he feels it pointed to the same truths. The personal soul (*jīvātmā*), he tells us, appeared as a lolling tongue of flame and tasted the disgusting substances of feces and urine. By so doing, it transcended the laws of purity and perceived that reality lies beyond such distinctions.

There is a passage in Ram Chandra Datta’s *Jivanavṛttānta* that throws a revealing light on these secret visions and their meanings, for it hooks them up explicitly with Kālī. In its details, the Datta passage is very close to the *Kathāmṛta* scene discussed above involving the lolling tongue touching feces and urine. Indeed, it is so close that we are probably dealing here with the earliest version of the same event (Datta’s text was published in 1890, eighteen years before Gupta’s volume 3). Datta entitles the section dealing with this scene “Discriminating with Sandal-Paste and Feces.”

While worshipping the goddess, Datta tells us, Ramakrishna decided to test the powers of his mind. Accordingly, he held his own feces in one hand and sandal paste (a perfumed cosmetic) in the other. As he held them in his two hands and pondered their natures, he realized that “all things on earth” become feces and that the two substances were really the same. All things he saw in the light of this ontological sameness (*samatā*). Here we are reminded immediately of the *Kathāmṛta* phrase “All became the same thing” and of the two emboldened realizations that formed the heart of the visions discussed above: “*Consciousness is one—nondifferent*” and “*All things are one—nondifferent*.” All three visions speak of reality behind the social world that is accessible only through a transgression of that society’s laws and norms.

Ramakrishna was convinced that he had seen into the nature of things. Just about everyone else, however, thought he had gone stark raving mad. Datta explains why: no one, except for the Tantric Aghoris, was known to have used feces in their *sādhana* or “mystical practice.” This lack of respectable precedence (apparently, the Aghoris were considered

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 3.46; italicized words are boldface in the Bengali edition.



to be a shady lot) rendered Ramakrishna's analysis of feces and sandal paste particularly controversial. Accordingly, Ramakrishna's cousin tried to take the young saint aside and dissuade him from his fecal ways, but nothing came of his pleadings. Finally, someone—we are not told who—stepped in and addressed Ramakrishna with these words: "I have heard that you took your own shit in *sādhana*. Everyone can be called this kind of Knower of Brahman. Who does not touch their own shit? Unless you are able to touch another person's feces, you cannot be called a true Knower of Brahman."<sup>54</sup> if such words were meant to dissuade the young saint from his troubling practices, they failed miserably, for Ramakrishna took them not as a scolding, but as a challenge and, as was his practice in handling criticisms and challenges, relayed the man's words to Kālī. Apparently, the goddess also took them as a challenge, for she responded by entering Ramakrishna's body. At that moment, possessed by the goddess and her lolling tongue, the saint went down to the river where people defecate and urinate. There he took some clay laced with feces and touched it to his tongue, "and he felt no disgust (*ghṛṇā*)."<sup>55</sup> Datta glosses the scene with his own authentication—"I have heard from his mouth that when he touched the tongue to the feces, it did not smell bad"<sup>56</sup>—and closes his discussion of the scene by identifying what he believes are the "very hidden meanings" embedded in the event. The mind of the person fully absorbed in God, Datta explains, is not affected by any thing or external action.<sup>57</sup> Ramakrishna proved that he was such a person by touching his tongue to feces.<sup>58</sup>

We see the same pattern again in two other passages in the *Kathāmrta*. The first one occurs in volume 4. Ramakrishna is talking about his Tantric practices that the goddess enacted through him. All things were one. The sacred tulsi tree and the horseradish looked no different to the young saint at this point (recall the vision discussed above). Such a state had profound consequences for his eating habits. He would eat the leftovers of jackals, follow dogs around to share his bread with them, and wash his mouth out with muddy water.<sup>59</sup> It was as if he sought out the impure and the disgusting to commune with it through his mouth. In another scene, this one in volume 2, Ramakrishna explains how he wanted to eat Kālī herself: "I used to extend my mouth to the heavens and to the underworld and cry 'Ma'! It was as if I was going to eat Ma, like a fisherman throwing out his net and dragging in

<sup>54</sup> JV, p. 19.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>58</sup> Saradananda, probably drawing on Datta's account, mentions this scene only briefly in LP 2.8.23.

<sup>59</sup> KA 4.175.

the fish.”<sup>60</sup> Ramakrishna then breaks into a song, beginning with the line, “*This time I will eat you, O Kālī!*” At this Tantric period in his life, his was a state of madness defined by an all-consuming passion to eat everything and anything without distinction, which included the goddess herself.

#### THE PLACE OF DISGUST

So the tongue extends itself to commune with human meat, fish, wine, polluted rice, and even feces and urine. Again and again, it reaches out to commune with that which society deems disgusting. There is something Tantric about this tongue. All that wine and meat, all that emphasis on impurity—it all seems strangely coherent and meaningful. But what of the specifically sexual dimensions of the tongue? Sexual intercourse, after all, is an integral part of Tantric ritual. If Ramakrishna’s secret tongue is indeed a Tantric tongue, we would expect to see it reach out, not only for meat and wine, but also for sexual union. And indeed it does in volume 4 of the *Kathāmṛta*. I quote the vision in full:

This is very secret talk (*atiguhya kathā*)! I saw a boy of twenty-three exactly like me, going up the subtle channel, erotically playing with the vagina-shaped lotuses with his tongue! First the Anus, then the Phallus, then the Navel, the Four-petalled, the Six-petalled, the Ten-petalled—they were all drooping—now they became aroused! When he got to the heart—I remember it well—after he made love to it with his tongue, the drooping Twelve-petalled lotus became aroused—and blossomed forth! After that, the Sixteen-petalled lotus in the throat and the Two-petalled lotus in the forehead [became aroused]. Finally, the Thousand-petalled lotus blossomed forth! *Ever since then I have been in this state.*<sup>61</sup>

This is no ordinary vision. Ramakrishna explicitly connects it to the beginnings of his mystical life. If we are to take its contents as chronologically meaningful, we might speculate that it occurred when Ramakrishna was twenty-three, that is, sometime during his practices with his female Tantric guru, the Bhairavī. The most striking element of the vision is the tongue engaged in sexual play with the vagina-shaped lotuses. Such an image calls for some explanation. After all, despite his secret vision in which he saw God dwelling in the vagina of a bitch in the heat of canine intercourse,<sup>62</sup> this was not a man who thought

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 2.131.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 4.238; italicized words are boldface in the Bengali edition. Two other versions occur in *ibid.* 3.138 and *ibid.* 4.283. In *ibid.* 3.138, Ramakrishna describes the vision in an excited tone: “I saw the sexual intercourse of the Self!” (*dekhām ātmār ramaṇa*).

<sup>62</sup> “I saw with my own eyes God dwelling in the vagina! I saw God in the intercourse of a dog and a bitch” (*ibid.* 3.33). This vision is preceded by an emboldened “Listen! I’m telling you *something very secret!*”

highly of oral contact with the vagina. Indeed, he once compared men attached to Lover-and-Gold to the jackals and dogs who “wet their faces” in their mates’ behinds.<sup>63</sup> The saint could not even touch a flesh-and-blood woman: a simple brush sent excruciating pains through the saint’s flesh, as if he had been stung by a horned fish, and took away his breath.<sup>64</sup> He frequently commented that the gory contents of the female body—blood, intestinal worms, fat, phlegm, piss, guts, and bad smells—disgusted (*ghṛṇā*) him.<sup>65</sup> It is not much of an exaggeration, then, to say that Ramakrishna was absolutely terrified of the polluting substances of the female body and the contact with them that sexual activity inevitably brings.

Given all of this, it seems reasonable to ask where Ramakrishna would have gotten such an image. The association between the vagina and flowers is common enough. The *Kālī Tantra*, for example, secretly<sup>66</sup> refers to the woman’s genitals as the “woman’s flower” (*latā-puṣpa*)<sup>67</sup> and describes a menstruating woman as the “flowered one” (*puṣpitā*).<sup>68</sup> The *Kathāmṛta* is just as rich in symbolic equations between the vagina and flowers. In it, for example, Ramakrishna compares the Kartābhajā practice of *coitus reservatus* with the bee who sits on the flower “without sipping the honey.”<sup>69</sup> Other figures in the text are more explicit. Consider, for example, the Tāntrika’s interpretation of the “stem” and “lotuses” of *kunḍalinī yoga* as Śiva’s phallus and the goddess’s vagina in the act of intercourse.<sup>70</sup> It is probably no accident that the Tāntrika’s term for the vaginal shape of the “lotuses” (*yonirūpa*) is the very same term Ramakrishna used to described the “lotuses” of his own vision. Both were certainly drawing on a common Tantric culture.

It is likely, then, that Ramakrishna’s vagina-shaped lotuses are of Tantric origin. But what about the act of licking or penetrating them with his tongue? His stray comments that the Bhairavī “forced” him into strange rituals may be of significance here.<sup>71</sup> Given that Ramakrishna

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 5.215. Nikhilananda (n. 4 above) tones this down considerably by translating “wet their faces in” (*mukha jubare thāke*) as “revel in” (p. 1013).

<sup>64</sup> KA 1.111, 1.189, 2.231, 2.232, 3.124.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 3.19 and following. See ibid. 2.262 for Narendra’s adoption of the same list.

<sup>66</sup> Smṛititirtha says that “there is a special secret meaning of this in the *sādhana* of the Hero,” but he will not tell us what it is (see his comments on *Kālī-Tantra* 3.1, in Smṛititirtha, ed. [n. 17 above], p. 49).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 4.2, p. 57.

<sup>69</sup> KA 4.134.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 5.103.

<sup>71</sup> See ibid. 4.232 for Ramakrishna’s being “forced” and ibid. 3.24 for Ramakrishna’s descriptions of the Tantric rituals he performed as being “very strange” (*bhāri uḥkaṭa*) and “not for the flippant” (*cālāki nae*). See also LP (n. 5 above) 2.11.7 for the Bhairavī’s “making” (*anuṣṭhāna karāno*) Ramakrishna undertake the Tantric rituals.

invariably went into a trance every time he was “tested”<sup>72</sup> or placed in his ritual partner’s lap, which effectively made ritual intercourse redundant,<sup>73</sup> one could speculate that the Bhairavī attempted to engage her disciple in a ritualized form of cunnilingus. Perhaps this is how Ramakrishna learned of the Tantric practice of drinking three drops of wine from the vagina, that “Place of Disgust” (*ghṛṇār sthāna*).<sup>74</sup> Although I am only speculating here, I think that there is good reason to take such a possibility seriously. The type and number of adjectives used in the texts to describe (or refuse to describe) Ramakrishna’s Tantric practices suggest as much: “horrific”<sup>75</sup> and “extremely obscene,”<sup>76</sup> for example, resonate quite well with Ramakrishna’s jackals wetting their faces in their mates’ disgusting behinds.

#### THE FIVE M’S

If we take all of these passages together, we might conclude that, at least from Ramakrishna’s perspective, it was not *his* tongue that ate the Muslim’s defiled rice, that licked the feces and urine, that tasted the flesh of a corpse, shared its food with jackals and dogs, and aroused the vagina-shaped lotuses. Psychologically speaking, it was Kālī’s. Ramakrishna, after all, could not perform such acts by himself. The texts state clearly that such events were only enacted in visions and maddened states of possession, that is, at times when Ramakrishna was under the control of the goddess. Moreover, in all of the visions and states discussed here, the tongue functions as an instrument of union. It unites with the disgusting and the impure. It extends itself into the heart of Reality by communing with that which society considers impure. It, thus, breaks the bond of disgust and initiates its possessor into an experience of ontological Sameness, Unity, or Nondifference. The tongue, be it Ramakrishna’s or the goddess’s, thus fulfills a basically mystical function.

<sup>72</sup> Many people living with Ramakrishna believed that the saint’s madness stemmed from his sexual continence. Some prescribed oils and medicines, others aphrodisiacs. Some were even more forthright, suggesting “sleeping with a woman” (*stri-sahavāsa*) as a cure (JV, p. 26). At some point, Datta tells us, Ramakrishna’s nephew took the young priest aside and talked to him about the matter “in secret” (*gopane*), but his mind could not be changed (ibid. p. 26). Something had to be done. What followed was a whole series of sexual temptations, orchestrated by everyone from Hriday to the superiors of the temple (Mathur, the temple proprietor, and Rani, the temple owner) to the Bhairavī (Ramakrishna’s female Tantric guru). Datta records a number of these bawdy scenes for us in chapter 9 of his *Jivanavṛttānta* under the euphemistic heading, “Testing the Senses” (*indriya parikṣā*; ibid. pp. 34–37).

<sup>73</sup> The Bhairavī sometimes used other women to train her young disciple (LP 2.111.8, 2.11.10).

<sup>74</sup> KA 3.51.

<sup>75</sup> JV, p. 37.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

But why the tongue? What is it about the tongue that makes it a privileged organ of union and mystical experience? Surely Tantra and its ritual of the Five M's are of significance here. The objects of Ramakrishna's Tantric tongue, after all, amount to a rough equivalent of the Five M's: *madya* (wine), *matsya* (fish), *maṃsa* (meat), and *maithuna* (sexual intercourse), at least. Indeed, all we are missing is the M of *mudrā* (parched grain), which no one seems to be able to identify anyway. For Ramakrishna, the tongue is *the* Tantric organ. Indeed, when the saint must fulfill the only M that does not necessarily involve the tongue, *maithuna* (sexual intercourse), he uses, once again, his tongue.

But, despite Kālī's Tantric tongue, Ramakrishna never made it through the Five M's, although he certainly tried or was made to try. Indeed, the only M he seems to have truly conquered was *matsya* (fish), but this was the very M his culture had accepted already as a legitimate food. This victory, in other words, was not much of a victory. He did consume a piece of "rotten flesh," which fulfilled the first M, *maṃsa* (meat), but every other M gave Ramakrishna serious problems. *Madya* and *maithuna* were particularly difficult for him. He simply could not bring himself to drink *madya* (wine) and could only fall into trances when presented with the fifth and most important M, *maithuna* (sexual intercourse). He had to enact this M in an unconscious state and then only with his tongue and a series of purified vaginas, homologized to the lotus. Moreover, when these last two M's (*madya* and *maithuna*) were combined—for example, in the ritual of drinking wine from the vagina—the saint showed only ridicule and disgust. Ramakrishna, in other words, was a failed Tāntrika. But only in his external life with his female Tantric guru. In his inner life, in his secret visions, he conquered like a true Tantric Hero (*vīra*) that which he so feared and hated in his waking life. True, it was an unconscious victory, one accomplished despite Ramakrishna himself, but it was a victory nonetheless.

#### THE LATRINE OF THE HOUSE

Ramakrishna, then, was an unwilling, unconscious Tāntrika, profoundly uncomfortable in his Tantric world. Perhaps such a "split" attitude toward Tantra comes out best in the saint's metaphor for the Tantric path. Practicing Tantra, he taught, was like entering the House of Mystical Experience through the latrine (*pāyakhānā*).<sup>77</sup> Tantra is a path, but a very, very "dirty" (*noṃra*) one;<sup>78</sup> you can get in through it, but only by wiggling through a small gutter running with the most disgusting of substances.

<sup>77</sup> KA 4.134, 5.181. Nikhilananda (n. 4 above) refuses to translate this "disgusting" expression and instead replaces it with a more innocent, and certainly more pure, "the back door" (see, e.g., p. 513).

<sup>78</sup> KA 3.63.

This tendency on Ramakrishna's part to associate Tantra with the body's excrements is most likely based on the practices of a local Tantric community, whose leader, a certain Vaishnavacharan, the saint knew quite well. In volume 5 of the *Kathāmṛta*, Ramakrishna relates the practices of Vaishnavacharan's secret community as if he were a firsthand witness to its truths: "Vaishnavacharan followed the views of the Kartābhajās.<sup>79</sup> When I went to that place in Shyambajar, I said to them that this kind of view is not mine, that my view is the state of the Child. I saw that they talked big but behaved improperly. . . . Many of them follow the view of the *Rādha Tantra*. The essences of Earth, Fire, Water, Wind and Space [become in their practice] Shit, Piss, Menstrual Blood and Semen. All these are the essences! This practice is a very dirty practice, like entering a house through the latrine."<sup>80</sup> It was Vaishnavacharan's Kartābhajā sect that put Ramakrishna to the "test" in his Tantric days by subjecting him to sexual temptations. Perhaps it was this same sect that taught the young Ramakrishna to discriminate between feces and sandal paste. Certainly, this community's ritual use of the bodily fluids played an important role in forming Ramakrishna's mystical experiences. For even if the saint never actually participated in the ritual of the Five Essences (a variant, no doubt, of the Five M's), the basic Tantric intuition lying behind that ritual—that pollution and impurity can be used to induce mystical states—deeply informed the manner in which Ramakrishna experienced the world, his body, and the divine. In short, despite Ramakrishna's alleged rejection of Tantra as the dirty latrine, it was precisely this latrine through which he entered the House of Mystical Experience. His rejection of Tantra, then, was not a categorical rejection. It was a rejection that was also a disgruntled, and perhaps embarrassed, acceptance of a truth displayed in his own secret life.

The ambivalence embodied in Kālī's tongue, extended to express both a state of arousal and a state of shame, was thus embodied again in Ramakrishna's tongue: "How many more things I could say but cannot. . . . It is as if someone were holding my mouth shut! . . . Have I done something wrong? Should all of this (secret) talk have been spoken?"<sup>81</sup> Ramakrishna knows that he has said too much, that he has revealed some of the disgusting secrets of the latrine. Accordingly, he feels someone else "pressing" his mouth, "biting the tongue" for him, if you will. This tongue expressing Tantric secrets and then being pressed down by another into a shamed silence—is this not Kālī's tongue?

<sup>79</sup> Literally, they who "worship" (*bhaja*) the "human guru" (*kartā*).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 5.180–81.

<sup>81</sup> KA 3.141.

## 3. KĀLĪ'S TONGUE AS THE TEXTS

This same "bitten" expression of Tantra defines the entire textual history of the Ramakrishna tradition. As it had done in the iconographic history of Kālī and in the secret life of Ramakrishna, in the texts that recorded the life and teachings of Ramakrishna the culture once again extended its "tongue" both to proclaim a Tantric transcendence of "shame, disgust, and fear" and to express a sense of embarrassment over that very act. Accordingly, the texts of Datta, Gupta, and Saradananda all delight in revealing the "secret talk" and "hidden meanings" of the saint's life but then differ profoundly over what these secrets mean and often attempt to conceal their truths in the very act of revelation. Having looked at Kālī's tongue *in* the texts, then, I want to look now at the texts *as* Kālī's tongue and analyze their historical development as yet another example of the culture's struggle with Tantra and its mystical use of the shameful and the disgusting.

RAM CHANDRA DATTA'S JĪVANAVR̥TTĀNTA (1890): THE "BOSH AND ROT" OF SECRETS MADE PUBLIC

In November of 1894, Narendra Datta (later to become Swami Vivekananda) wrote to a certain Alasinga Prema about a biography of Ramakrishna that his own cousin (Ram Chandra Datta) had just recently published: "I am simply ashamed of the Bengali book . . . *Bosh and rot*."<sup>82</sup> It is not difficult to see why Narendra thought so little of his cousin's biography. The biography ignores Narendra's "Vedantic" hermeneutic for reading the life of Ramakrishna and does not even mention Narendra once! Why? We are never told explicitly, but Ram does go out of his way to tell his readers that certain well-known disciples threatened to sue him if he included their names in his biography (Narendra, I might add, was once a law student). Ram stresses the absurdity of all this but does not hesitate to offer two theories: perhaps such disciples wanted to make themselves into saints in place of the Paramahansa, or perhaps they simply did not want the shame of their previous lives to be exposed before the public. Denying that he fears any legal action, Ram closes the matter by describing these unnamed disciples as troublemakers who do not deserve to have their names connected with Ramakrishna anyway.<sup>83</sup> To make matters worse, Datta's Ramakrishna, unlike the future Swami's, possesses many troubling secrets. Ram tells his readers that it is a terrible fault to hold anything back in telling the story of Ramakrishna: "Because

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Narasingha P. Sil's "Vivekānanda's Rāmākṣṇa: An Untold Story of Mythmaking and Propaganda," *NUMEN* 40 (1993): 50 (italics in original).

<sup>83</sup> *JV*, p. 144. I am using a hand-copied manuscript of the third edition here, for which I have no listed publication details.

of this, we have revealed many secret things (*guhya kathā*).<sup>84</sup> One can almost see Narendra wincing between the lines.

These secrets are strewn throughout the biography but seem to concentrate themselves in the sections on Ramakrishna's *sādhana*s. A quick trip through these thirteen chapters reveals a wealth of new material that has never made it into the scholarly discourse on Ramakrishna. In chapter 4, for example, we are told that, while praying for a vision of Kālī, Ramakrishna defecated and urinated unconsciously and appeared "like an infant at its mother's breasts."<sup>85</sup> Following this mystical regression, Ramakrishna became especially fascinated with fecal matter. Accordingly, chapters 5 and 6 tell the stories of Ramakrishna cleaning the temple latrine and his "Discriminating with Sandal-Paste and Feces" that I have analyzed above. Chapter 7 ends with the public's being angry and scandalized at both Ramakrishna's use of his own and other people's feces and his assertion that, since every woman embodies the Divine Mother, sex with any woman constitutes an act of incest or "raping of the mother" (*mātrharaṇa*). Oils, aphrodisiacs, medicines, and, above all, sex are all prescribed to cure Ramakrishna of such mad notions.<sup>86</sup>

Chapter 8, entitled "Union with the Brāhmaṇī," tells the story of Ramakrishna's Tantric *sādhana*s, practices that Datta describes as "very scary,"<sup>87</sup> "horrific,"<sup>88</sup> and "filled with obscenities."<sup>89</sup> Datta tells his readers that he has heard many things about Ramakrishna's "union" (*milana*)<sup>90</sup> with the Bhairavī, but that he cannot reveal such things to the public. He must keep secrets. But in the very next paragraph, as if he could not bear to keep *this* secret, Datta describes a scene in which a goat is sacrificed to Kālī. No sooner has the sword decapitated the goat than the Bhairavī, taking on the identity of the goddess, drinks a plate of its blood and eats a "blood-smeared newly cut-off banana," most likely a reference to the goat's penis. Ramakrishna grins.<sup>91</sup> Chapter 9, euphemistically entitled "Testing of the Senses" (*indriya parikṣā*), takes up the suggestions with which chapter 7 ended and relates one bawdy temptation scene after another, all designed to cure Ramakrishna

<sup>84</sup> "Introduction," in *ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> The phrase Datta uses is *brāhmaṇī sahita milana*. The phrase could mean either "union with the Brāhmaṇī" or "meeting with the Brāhmaṇī," depending on how one wants to take the verbal noun, *milana*. As it is used in the texts, the term can refer either to the sexual pleasure a wife and husband experience in their conjugal relations (*KA* 5.118) or to a specifically mystical form of sexual union (*JV*, p. 51; *KA* 3.122). It can, however, also mean simply "meeting."

<sup>91</sup> *JV*, p. 33.



of his madness: Ramakrishna is taken to a brothel and surrounded by a host of naked prostitutes; a woman is hired to sneak into his bedroom and try to seduce him; and, finally, Ramakrishna is taken to a local Tantric sect where one woman sticks his "big toe" in her mouth while a second woman performs "an extremely obscene act" in front of the baffled saint.<sup>92</sup> All of these ploys fail to cure Ramakrishna of his madness and his scandalous notions regarding sex. Confronted with the possibility of sex with a woman, Ramakrishna repeatedly falls into trances, crying "Ma! Ma!" The public is convinced that Ramakrishna's masculinity has been destroyed (*puruṣatvahāni*).<sup>93</sup>

After telling the stories of yet another scandal (Ramakrishna's eating of the goddess's food offering) and of Ramakrishna's Hanumān state in chapters 10 and 11, Datta devotes two whole chapters, chapters 12 and 13, to Ramakrishna's Handmaid state, when the saint dressed in women's clothes and took on the *bhāva* or "state" of a "Handmaid" (*sakhī*) of the goddess. For Datta, this period in Ramakrishna's life is intimately related, both geographically and psychologically, to Mathur, the temple proprietor, for many of the scenes related in these two chapters occur at Janbajar,<sup>94</sup> the family residence of Mathur, and involve unusually intimate contact with Mathur and his family. Mathur, Datta tells us, could not bear to be away from Ramakrishna at this time. He would dress Ramakrishna himself with expensive women's clothes and jewelry that he himself provided. His daughters would bathe him and rub his naked body with oils, which would send the young priest into unconscious states, "but in this," Datta assures us, "no one was corrupted."<sup>95</sup> In another scene, Ramakrishna enters Mathur's bedroom at an inopportune time, which angers Mathur and his wife and leads them to exclaim: "Baba! Now that you've watched us, why are you leaving? Do you have something else in mind?"<sup>96</sup> Datta then relates another scene, perhaps to hint at the nature of this "something else." In this next scene, after "a certain kind of mood" comes upon Mathur, Mathur asks Ramakrishna to lie down in bed with him. Ramakrishna makes no objections to Mathur's request.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps it was scenes such as these

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>94</sup> Ramakrishna imagined his move to Janbajar as a virtual kidnapping or abduction, with Mathur as the demon Rāvaṇa and him as the pure and truthful Sītā: "When the carriage reached Chitpore Road, the Master had a wonderful vision. He felt that he had become Sītā and that Rāvaṇa was kidnapping him." The move to Janbajar, in other words, had sexual connotations for Ramakrishna (quoted in Narasingha P. Sil's *Rāmākṣṇa Paramahansa: A Psychological Profile* [Leiden: Brill, 1991], p. 32).

<sup>95</sup> *JV*, p. 49.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

that Datta regarded as “secret,” too controversial for “the public”<sup>98</sup> to learn of and yet too engaging for Datta not to tell.<sup>99</sup>

The major organizing principle of Datta’s account of Ramakrishna’s *sādhana*s is a general Tantric or Śākta framework in which he interprets Ramakrishna’s experiences. Ramakrishna’s Handmaid state, for example, is interpreted by Datta as a metaphysical symbol for the psychic forces (*manovṛtti*) that aid Rādhā, in the form of *kuṇḍalinī*, on her way to the Thousand-petaled Lotus in the head, where Kṛṣṇa waits for her arrival.<sup>100</sup> Datta’s interpretation of Islam is similar in its emphasis on the mystical and the erotic. “From a metaphysical perspective” (*tattva-pakṣe*), Datta tells us, Mohammad’s promise of heavenly maidens to the man who kills a heretic constitutes a promise of “intellectual sex” (*vidyār sahavāsa*) with the feminine “energy of gnosis” (*vidyāśakti*) to the man who can kill the emotional and mental enemies within.<sup>101</sup> For Datta, Ramakrishna lived in a Śākta world. His numerous experiments with different religious forms were understood to be Śākta states experienced in a Tantric world. They spoke of erotic unions in the subtle body and mystical sex with the powers of metaphysical knowledge.

All of this conflicted profoundly with the Vedantic hermeneutic that Narendra would later develop to explain his Master’s teachings. How could a book that dedicates page after page to Ramakrishna’s “union” with the Bhairavī (chap. 8) but gives Ramakrishna’s Vedantic tutelage under the monk Tota Puri only a single paragraph, and this only in a chapter dealing with Ramakrishna’s early period of madness,<sup>102</sup> not offend Narendra? Clearly, we are here a long way from (or before) Vivekananda’s refashioning of Ramakrishna into a Vedantic sage.<sup>103</sup> Perhaps this is another reason why Datta’s *Jivānavṛttānta* has received such little attention in Bengali culture and has never been translated. Is it a mere coincidence that the beginning of the text’s eighteen-year-eclipse (1917) coincides roughly with the publication of the Saradananda’s *Lilāprasāṅga* (1911–18)? Certainly, Narendra’s original impression of the book as “bosh and rot” has been shared by his fellow monks and their followers, none of whom speak of the book or sell it in their

<sup>98</sup> “The public” (*sādhāraṇa*) appears numerous times in Datta’s text and always as that anonymous group that is fundamentally incapable of understanding the deep secrets of Ramakrishna (*ibid.*, pp. 33, 37, 50).

<sup>99</sup> For an extended treatment of the homoerotic elements in Ramakrishna’s religious experiences, see my “Ramakrishna’s Foot: Mystical Homoeroticism in the *Kathāmṛta*,” in *Religion, Homosexuality and Literature*, ed. Michael L. Stemmeler and José Cabezón (Dallas: Monument Press, 1992).

<sup>100</sup> *JV*, p. 51.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22.

<sup>103</sup> For an excellent treatment of Vivekananda’s refashioning, see Sil’s “An Untold Story” (n. 82 above).

many bookstores. As a result, now Ram's *Jīvanavṛttānta*, that book of public secrets, exists only in a few Calcutta libraries in the form of decaying copies that will be gone for good in a few generations, victims of the heat, the humidity, and the bugs. Narendra, at least, would be relieved.

GUPTA'S KATHĀMRĪTA (1902–32): REVEALING AND CONCEALING  
THE SECRET IN CYCLES

Like Datta's *Jīvanavṛttānta*, Gupta's five-volume *Kathāmṛta* contains its own secret talk, and, not surprisingly, it, too, is related to Tantra. These Tantric secrets, however, are recorded with a strategy rather different from Datta's nonstrategy and simple insistence that "it is a terrible fault to hold anything back." In the end, Gupta, like Datta, holds little back, but he is very careful, consciously or not, about *when* he releases a secret onto the printed and published page. Let me explain. Gupta's five volumes, based on diary notes that he recorded when he was with the saint between the years 1882 and 1886, were later published serially over a span of thirty years (1902, 1904, 1908, 1910, 1932). One might expect that these five volumes would follow a neat chronological sequence, with volume 1 beginning with Gupta's first encounters in 1882 and with volume 5 ending in 1886. But this is not what we find. Instead, the five volumes defy any linear sequence and overlap one another in cycles, with each volume beginning anew in 1882,<sup>104</sup> the year Gupta first met Ramakrishna, and ending again in 1886, the year of Ramakrishna's death. No one has been able to offer any good reason for why Gupta arranged them in such a way.<sup>105</sup> R. K. Das Gupta raises the issue in 1986 and offers his own tentative explanation: "Why Mahendranath covers all the years between 1882 and 1886 in all the five volumes and why he did not arrange the conversations in a chronological order from February 1882 to April 1886 it is difficult to say. . . . Perhaps he perceived some progression in the circle, some blooming of a consciousness in the disciples, some forward-moving spirit in them, and above all some significant changes in the temper of the Master himself and wanted to show that progression in each volume to make it viable as a divine story."<sup>106</sup> Das Gupta, apparently not impressed by this progressive circle, goes on to suggest that

<sup>104</sup> Except for vol. 4. It begins in 1883.

<sup>105</sup> On a related question, Why do the different volumes present Ramakrishna differently? M himself has explained the various readings by comparing his different volumes to the different Gospels of the Bible, each of which presents Jesus in a different light (Dharm Pal Gupta, *Life of M. and Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* [Chandigarh: Sri Ma Trust, 1988], p. 263).

<sup>106</sup> R. K. Das Gupta, "Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita as a Religious Classic," in *Commemorative Souvenir: 150th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna, Centenary of the*

he thinks no harm would be done if the dates were rearranged chronologically, something the Ramakrishna Mission's publishing wing, Udbodhana, had done already in their one-volume 1986 edition when Das Gupta published his article that same year.

I do not share Das Gupta's indifference to the text's ordering. How can something as seemingly illogical as five cyclical volumes be without significance? I do, however, share something of Das Gupta's insight into the "blooming" nature of the volumes. But that which "blooms" in the five volumes is not "a consciousness in the disciples" or "the temper of the Master"; rather, that which blossoms in the cyclical course of the five volumes is the audacity of Gupta himself in revealing Ramakrishna's Tantric secrets. Take, for example, a series of seventeen passages that I have identified as secret-talk (*guhya kathā*) passages.<sup>107</sup> These secret-talk passages are strewn throughout the five volumes. They are not, however, distributed randomly. On the contrary, they group themselves into an interesting "blossoming" pattern. The first volume (1902), for example, does not contain a single secret-talk passage, and volume 2 (1904) contains only a single passage. Volume 3 (1908), a kind of "transition volume," contains five such passages. Volume 4 (1910), however, contains eight secret passages, many of them structured around the "shame and disgust" theme that I have analyzed above. Volume 5 (1932), by far the shortest of the volumes, contains three secret-talk passages along with numerous passages which, although they cannot be described technically as secret-talk passages (for they do not contain the term *guhya kathā*), nevertheless contain material that will be "problematic" for the later tradition.

Gupta, it seems, took five separate passes through his diaries, published the easy, publicly digestible material "up front" in the early volumes, and kept the secret material back as long as he could, preferring to group it more or less in volumes 4 and 5 rather than spread it out evenly throughout all five. The five volumes, in other words, are structured around a secret or, to be more precise, around Gupta's attempt to simultaneously reveal and conceal Ramakrishna's secrets. The secrets are there, but they are "hidden" well within the innermost twists and turns of a five-volume spiral. The result is reluctant text, whose volumes "blossom," or perhaps better, "spiral" unconsciously into the heart of a Tantric secret.

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*Ramakrishna Order and 49th Foundation-Day of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture*, ed. Swami Lokeshwarananda (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1987), pp. 97–98.

<sup>107</sup> See my "Revealing and Concealing the Secret: A Textual History of Mahendranath Gupta's *Śrīśrīrāmākṣṇakathāmr̥ta*," in *Calcutta, Bangladesh, and Bengal Studies*, ed. Clinton B. Seely (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1991), pp. 245–52.

What is Ramakrishna's secret? Put simply: Tantra and its use of the erotic, the shameful, and the disgusting to induce mystical states.<sup>108</sup> Although I cannot develop such a thesis here, a quick trip through Ramakrishna's secret-talk passage can add some substance to it. Volume 3, for example, records Ramakrishna's secret talk on the "Love Body" (*premer śarīra*) that forms through mystical practice: this body possesses love-eyes and love-ears, even love-genitals. With such a spiritual body, one can have "sex with the Self."<sup>109</sup> In this same volume, Ramakrishna also has an important vision of a dirt-filled "thief's chamber" on his way to defecate,<sup>110</sup> sees the sacred in the sexual union of a dog and a bitch,<sup>111</sup> and describes how the Incarnation "sucks" the juice of devotion out of his disciples, "just as one sucks a flower to get a little honey."<sup>112</sup> In volume 4, that most secret of the volumes, Gupta records Ramakrishna revealing that he used to see a naked Paramahansa boy materialize out of his body. He would "teasingly fondle" the boy's "little cock" (*dhana*) and then "laugh a lot."<sup>113</sup> Just a page later, Ramakrishna secretly describes a Tantric state in which he could not help but to worship the "little cocks" of boys with sandal paste and flowers.<sup>114</sup> In yet another place, again in volume 4, Ramakrishna tells Gupta, in secret, that he wants to kiss and embrace the boy Purna (one of his boy disciples) as if Purna were a man and he were a woman.<sup>115</sup> Still in this same fourth volume, there is also a secret description of how Kṛṣṇa worshipped Rādhā's *brahmayoni* (cosmic vagina);<sup>116</sup> a vision in which a naked Ramakrishna plays with the boy Purna (also naked) in a Fog of Bliss;<sup>117</sup> and the mystical cunnilingus vision that I have analyzed above. Finally, although they are not technically listed as secret talk, there are also passages in this fourth volume that contain, among other things, a description of how Ramakrishna dislocated his left hand while he was trying to erotically engage the divine on his way to defecate,<sup>118</sup>

<sup>108</sup> For a full answer to this question, see my *Kālī's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, in press).

<sup>109</sup> KA 3.22. The expression "sex with the Self" is *ātmār sahita ramaṇa*.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 3.33.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. 3.179.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 4.231. Nikhilananda (n. 4 above) mistranslates this: "I used to joke with him" (p. 813).

<sup>114</sup> KA 4.232. Nikhilananda completely omits this confession (p. 814).

<sup>115</sup> KA 4.271. It should be pointed out here that this day was "split" by Gupta to conceal this "secret" confession. The afternoon conversation of the day was recorded in the very first volume (1902), whereas the morning sessions, when the confession occurred, was kept for the fourth (1910).

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. 4.232.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. 4.259.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 4.227.

theological reflections on the nature of the Incarnation and his *liṅgam*-like love for his disciples,<sup>119</sup> a scene in which Ramakrishna cannot defecate because he falls into *samādhi* watching a certain “Mishra” (the “mixed” Hindu-Christian) take off his Western pants to reveal an ochre loincloth underneath,<sup>120</sup> and a self-description of how the saint’s ecstatic states used to possess him like ghosts until he finally could expel them out through his bowels.<sup>121</sup> Volume 5 adds little to this amazing list. Ramakrishna describes how he circumambulated the “seat of bliss” (a woman’s lap) to conquer lust,<sup>122</sup> gives Gupta some general instructions on the renunciation of Lover-and-Gold, and explains the details of some mystical techniques (which Gupta unfortunately refuses to share with us),<sup>123</sup> but not much more. By volume 5, it seems, Gupta had more or less exhausted his diaries. There was not much left to tell.

We have already seen what happened to the secrets recorded in Datta’s biography. They were simply ignored, left untranslated. But this strategy would never work for Gupta’s famous *Kathāmṛta*. It was just too central and important a document to leave to the white ants and the weather’s sweat. A new strategy was thus developed. It would be “translated.” Swami Nikhilananda took up the task in 1942 in New York. The fruit of his labors, his *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, would become internationally recognized as a spiritual masterpiece.

The Swami followed two principles in his translation project that effectively erased much of Ramakrishna’s secret talk from the text. First of all, he decided to rearrange each dated scene “back” into its proper chronological sequence. There were no cycles now. There was only a running calendar. As a result, the secrets that were once more or less concentrated in volume 4 were now randomly strewn throughout a thousand sprawling pages, those secrets, that is, which managed to escape Nikhilananda’s careful and consistent mistranslations. Those passages that did not escape—and there were many of them—were either cleverly distorted or simply omitted. Perhaps when he sat down to work, Nikhilananda remembered the words of his other Master, Swami Vivekananda, who once wrote that he wanted the world to read about Ramakrishna’s life and teachings in English translations purified of all “irregular indecent expressions about sex.”<sup>124</sup> Certainly that is exactly what Nikhilananda would give the world. From here on, there would be no more “shit-plopping basket-assed whores”<sup>125</sup> or oral sex with

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 4.193.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. 4.277.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 4.232.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. 5.25.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. 5.96.

<sup>124</sup> Quoted in Sil’s “An Untold Story” (n. 82 above), p. 54.

<sup>125</sup> KA 3.142.

vagina-shaped lotuses, as the Bengali text reads. Now there would only be “prostitutes covered with filth” and inexplicable “communions.”

Unfortunately, most scholars, perhaps out of linguistic necessity, seem to have taken Nikhilananda at his word that his translation is a “literal” one and that he has omitted “only a few pages of no particular interest to English-speaking readers.”<sup>126</sup> This unfortunate situation has only been compounded by the fact that most of the French<sup>127</sup> and German<sup>128</sup> editions of Gupta's *Kathāmṛta* are in fact simply translations of English texts, namely, Gupta's 1907 English paraphrase of the first two volumes of his *Kathāmṛta*<sup>129</sup> and Nikhilananda's *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Just about everyone, it seems, has been working with seriously flawed texts.<sup>130</sup>

To sum up, we might say that the history of Gupta's *Kathāmṛta* is marked by a series of reluctant revelations and half-concealments that structured the life of the text from the very beginning. These secrets, primarily Tantric, seem to have both fascinated and worried Gupta. Thus, the *Kathāmṛta* is at once a bold and a reluctant text, extending its “tongue” to proclaim the mystical truths of Tantra and then, as if realizing what it has done, “biting” that very tongue in an act of public shame. This “biting” of Ramakrishna's Tantric tradition in the cycles of the Bengali *Kathāmṛta* is then carried further by the obfuscating English translation of Nikhilananda. The secret that was once haltingly revealed in the concealing cycles of a 1,200-page Bengali text was, thus, soon concealed again—this time in Nikhilananda's famous *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Now encoded in a complex cyclical structure and virtually effaced in a bowdlerized translation, Ramakrishna's secret awaits to be revealed again.

<sup>126</sup> Nikhilananda, p. vii.

<sup>127</sup> *L'Evangile de Sri Ramakrishna*, which is referenced in D. P. Gupta, p. 278, but full publication details are not given. This text is based on Gupta's 1907 English paraphrase (see n. 129 below).

<sup>128</sup> Kurt Friedrichs, trans., *Ramakrishna: Das Vermächtnis, Die Botschaft des indischen Heiligen und Lehrers der Neuzeit* (Munich: Goldmann, 1981); this incomplete translation of Nikhilananda appears to be the accepted German edition. Martin Kampchen has translated a selection of passages from the Bengali in his *Sri Rāmākṛishna: Setze Gott keine Grenzen, Gespräche des indischen Heiligen mit seinen Schülern* (Freiburg: Herderbücher, 1984), but the translation is small and is restricted to the “classical” pages of vol. 1. Consequently, no secrets are revealed.

<sup>129</sup> *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (according to M., a Son of the Lord and Disciple); or, the Ideal Man for India and for the World* (Madras: Brahmavadin Office, 1907).

<sup>130</sup> I am aware of only three shining exceptions to this scholarly neglect of the Bengali source materials: Malcolm D. MacLean's work, especially his “A Translation of the *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmākṛishna-Kathāmṛta* with Explanatory Notes and Critical Introduction” (Ph.D. diss., Otago University, 1983); Sumit Sarkar's “The Kathamrita as Text: Towards an Understanding of Ramakrishna Paramahansa,” *Occasional Papers on History and Society*, no. 22 (New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1985); and Sil's *Rāmākṛishna Paramahansa* (n. 94 above).

SARADANANDA'S *LĪLĀPRAŚAṄGA* (1911–18): HIDDEN MEANINGS HIDING SECRETS

Gupta, whose very name means “the Hidden,” did reveal, however reluctantly, the Tantric contents of Ramakrishna’s secret talk. The same, however, cannot be said for Saradananda and his famous *Lilāprasaṅga*, published originally (beginning in 1909) in serial form in the Ramakrishna Mission’s periodical, *Udbodhana*, and then later in five separate volumes between 1911 and 1918. Gupta’s reluctance in regard to Ramakrishna’s Tantric secrets became simple suppression in Saradananda’s *Lilāprasaṅga*, for, whereas Gupta reluctantly revealed Ramakrishna’s Tantric secrets by concealing them in a complex cyclical structure, Saradananda simply omitted them. Nervousness and reluctance were thus replaced by a strategy of silence. Consider, for example, what happens to Ramakrishna’s “secret” awakening of the *kuṇḍalinī* recorded above. Saradananda simply leaves out the erotic details of the vision: “Ramakrishna saw a luminous divine human form moving up the central channel. As it approached each lotus, it touched the lotus with its tongue, causing it to blossom.”<sup>131</sup> There is no mention of an erotic act or of the vaginal shape of the lotuses. The lotuses are not “aroused” (*ūrdhvamukha*) out of their “drooping” (*adhomukha*) state. They simply, and more innocently, “blossom” (*prasphuṭita*). In his English translation, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Nikhilananda follows Saradananda and has Ramakrishna “communing” with the lotuses with his tongue. The explicitly sexual verb *ramaṇa karā*, “to have intercourse with,” is replaced by an innocent “to commune with” and the vaginal shape of the lotuses is again simply left out.<sup>132</sup> In both versions, the reader is left wondering what Ramakrishna’s tongue was doing “touching” and “communing with” these lotuses.

To be fair, Tantra and its penchant for secrecy are discussed a number of times in Saradananda’s *Lilāprasaṅga*. Tantric practice, for example, is described as “secret practice” (*rahasyasādhana*).<sup>133</sup> Accordingly, Ramakrishna’s worship of his wife as the goddess is called “secret worship” (*rahasyapūjā*).<sup>134</sup> But Tantric secrecy in the *Lilāprasaṅga* is always a secrecy that borders on deception, a shady trick carried on under the cloak of religion. Saradananda thus attacks those “hidden truths” (*gūḍha satya*) that claim to preach the light but only extend the darkness by enjoining worldly pleasures as the goal of religion.<sup>135</sup> The Tantric Kāpālikas, for example, “secretly (*gupta*) preached in the name of religion an

<sup>131</sup> *LP* (n. 5 above) 2.11.21.

<sup>132</sup> Nikhilananda, p. 830.

<sup>133</sup> *LP* 2.11.17.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.* 2.20.19.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* 4.2.14.



extensive method of pleasure encompassing all the senses,"<sup>136</sup> and so led the people astray. At the time of the great sixteenth-century saint, Caitanya, the biographer tells us, the country was full of such secret sects.<sup>137</sup> Like Caitanya before him, Ramakrishna came to stem the tide of this sensuality carried on in the name of religion. Through his adoption of "the Child state," whereby every woman became his mother, Ramakrishna purified the erotic rituals of the Hero. He thus reformed the corrupt Tantric tradition by "advancing" (*pravṛtta*) it into a new, more spiritualized, form. This, for Saradananda, is the "hidden purpose" (*gūḍha abhiprāya*) of Ramakrishna's Tantric practices: "It is only the heavenly Master, the Incarnation of this age, who told us again and again that he never had taken a woman, not even in a dream. Thus, by causing the Master to advance the Tantric tradition through his adoption of the Child state in his practice of the heroic rituals, the Mother of the Universe has clearly revealed her hidden purpose."<sup>138</sup> The pure Devoted Child thus conquers the decadent Tantric Hero. Bhakti takes over Tantra, and Tantra is "advanced" by a profound reversal, its erotic base denied for a sexless, childlike state of devotion. It is interesting to compare Datta's approach to this same Tantric "problem." Writing some twenty years before Saradananda, he had rejected such a "purification" as a serious misrepresentation of both the Tantric tradition and Ramakrishna's place in it. For Datta, such interpretations are the *exact reverse* of Tantra's unabashedly horrific core: "The practices of Tantra are by nature horrific. The results of the practices cannot be attained without the Five M's. Even though many people want to reverse the literal meaning of the M's by demonstrating their 'deeper' mood or meaning, that is not the purpose of this book."<sup>139</sup>

But for Saradananda, unlike Datta and Gupta, Tantra is always suspect and in constant need of reform. As such, it is peripheral, at best, to the pure "hidden meanings" of Ramakrishna's life that Saradananda wants to uncover with his hagiographic method. The real "secret," for Saradananda, lies elsewhere. In order to lead the reader to this secret, to this hidden meaning, Saradananda's biography takes the form of a riddle: "We have said as much as we could. Now, O reader, reflect and see who this Master of endless states and forms is."<sup>140</sup> From the outside, from a strictly historical perspective, Saradananda knows that Ramakrishna

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 2.10.24

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 2.11.14.

<sup>139</sup> *JV* (n. 2 above), p. 31. The skeptical quotation marks are my own, but I do believe they are implied in the Bengali.

<sup>140</sup> *LP* 3.1.36.

appears slightly bizarre, a “strange”<sup>141</sup> enigma to the questioning mind: “On the day of their first meeting, Narendranath considered the Master to be half mad on account of the [strange] words with which he addressed him.”<sup>142</sup> But given the right key, a key Saradananda is anxious to supply, Ramakrishna’s strange words and actions can be unlocked and their “hidden meanings” uncovered: “It was very clear to the sharp intellect of Narendranath that, if only one would accept the Master as an Incarnation, then all of these words would make sense.”<sup>143</sup> With this key, with the knowledge that Ramakrishna was God incarnate, that which is strange or puzzling in Ramakrishna’s life becomes understandable, and that which is seemingly mundane or trivial takes on great significance. Biography becomes hagiography, a revelation of the sacred meanings secretly enfolded into Ramakrishna’s life.

The number and types of “hidden meanings” Saradananda is able to uncover with this hermeneutical key are impressive. With this key, for example, the reader can detect a “hidden connection” (*nigūḍha sambandha*) between Ramakrishna’s life and the Vedic or Eternal Religion and understand how the Master’s experiences fulfill, even prove, the scriptures.<sup>144</sup> With this key, one can detect a “hidden meaning” (*gūḍha artha*) in the fact that devotees of different faiths came to the Master.<sup>145</sup> One can see how the history of the world’s religions coheres and develops in and through the dialectical state of the Incarnation (*bhāvasamādhī*), open both to the phenomenal world and the divine, and understand how the world’s religious history is constituted by a series of doctrines, strung together as pearls on a thread, which each new Incarnation completes and fulfills.<sup>146</sup> With this same key, the reader can guess at the hidden relations (*gūḍha sambandha*) that existed between Ramakrishna and his disciples<sup>147</sup> and detect the hidden meanings (*gūḍha artha*) enfolded into even the most mundane of Ramakrishna’s actions, from his questioning of the temple priests about their sweets and fruit<sup>148</sup> to the Master’s final move to Calcutta before he died.<sup>149</sup>

<sup>141</sup> The word “strange” (*adbhūta*) appears dozens of times in the *Kathāmṛta* and *Līlā-prasaṅga* to describe the visions, ecstasies, and actions of Ramakrishna. See, for example, *KA* (n. 3 above) 1.41, 1.83, 1.105, 1.196, 1.205, 1.226, 1.230.

<sup>142</sup> *LP* 5.4.14.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, bk. 3, preface.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.* 4.2.27.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.* 4.7.4.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* 3.7.30. Ramakrishna questioned the temple priests about their sweets and fruits, because he suspected that they were using them to pay off their prostitutes. See also *ibid.* 3.18.33 for “a hidden state” (*gūḍhabhāva*).

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.* 5.12.1. Saradananda tells us that some saw in Ramakrishna’s move to Calcutta a hidden plan to convert the materialistic (i.e., Western-educated) Calcuttans back

With this incarnational key, that which is hidden becomes manifest. The reader can then see with Hriday that the Master was in fact an effulgent being and proclaim: "O Ramakrishna! O Ramakrishna! We are not human beings. Why are we here? Come, let us go from country to country and save souls! That which you are I am also."<sup>150</sup> It is a frenzied cry Saradananda would accept as an appropriate response to the hidden meanings of his sacred biography.

This is the secret encoded in Saradananda's hagiographic prose. This is the answer to the riddle—Ramakrishna is God, the Incarnation of the modern age. "Before I go away, I'll break the pot in the marketplace,"<sup>151</sup> Ramakrishna proclaims in the *Lilāprasāṅga*. Breaking the clay pot with his Master, Saradananda three times has Ramakrishna proclaiming, "He who appeared in the forms of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa and other Incarnations in previous ages now has come into this case . . . but this time he comes in secret (*guptabhāve*), like a king in disguise going out to see the city."<sup>152</sup> Ramakrishna, the new embodiment of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, the new divine king, walked through his kingdom, and no one recognized him except those who were privileged enough to belong to his Inner Circle.<sup>153</sup>

This motif of the secret king, which never occurs in the *Kathāmṛta* and may in fact represent an apocryphal tradition, is in many ways the central message of Saradananda's *Lilāprasāṅga*. Vivekananda had referred to this *yei rāma yei kṛṣṇa* quote ("He who was Rāma and he who was Kṛṣṇa . . .") as the saint's central message, his *mahāvākya* or "Great Saying" for the world, and had expanded it into a two-*śloka* Sanskrit verse.<sup>154</sup> It is quintessential Vivekananda, hyperbole and all. Whether or not Ramakrishna ever actually said it is impossible to say. Noting in the quote a certain "tone of dogmatic assertion" not at all apparent in the Ramakrishna of Gupta's *Kathāmṛta*, the historian, Sumit Sarkar, has expressed doubt that it is a genuine *ukti*, or "saying."<sup>155</sup> It is strange that the famous quote, so central to Saradananda's portrayal of his Master, never occurs in the *Kathāmṛta* and that it is so connected, both in its textual origin and historical development, to the person and hyperbolic style of Vivekananda. But whatever its origins, one thing is clear: by the time we get to Saradananda's *Lilāprasāṅga*, this

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to the ideals of renunciation and religious experience. The term "hidden meaning" occurs in the English but not in the Bengali edition.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. 2.18.16. Jagananda Vedantizes the passages by having Hriday say, "Come, let us go from country to country and set souls free from bondage."

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., bk. 5, appendix.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. 2.4.20, 2.8.28, 3.2.43. The phrase differs slightly in each occurrence.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. 3.5.13.

<sup>154</sup> KA 5.192–93. Saradananda works Vivekananda's extended version into LP 2.8.28.

<sup>155</sup> Sarkar (n. 130 above), p. 43.

saying, apocryphal or not, is the “Great Saying” of Ramakrishna, the interpretive key capable of unlocking all the “hidden meanings” of Ramakrishna’s strange actions and words.

We might say, then, that the *Lilāprasaṅga*, much like the *Kathāmṛta*, is defined by two types of secrets—Tantric secrets and incarnational secrets. Tantric secrets are discussed, but always ambivalently. When Ramakrishna’s Tantric secrets are recorded at all—and they seldom are—their contents are bowdlerized or simply omitted. In a very real sense, Ramakrishna the Tāntrika does not exist for Saradananda. Ramakrishna is presented as a reformer of Tantra, not as a bearer of Tantric secrets. Consequently, one of the hidden purposes of his advent was to reform the shady secrets of Tantra, certainly not to add to them. Ramakrishna’s incarnational secrets, on the other hand, are taken as the central message of Ramakrishna. They are the hidden meanings that give Ramakrishna’s life its coherence and significance. But these hidden meanings are very different from the secret talk of the *Jivanavṛt-tānta* and the *Kathāmṛta* in that they manifest no erotic dimensions. The secret of Ramakrishna has been transformed into an ideal, almost docetic, state in which Ramakrishna’s temptations are taken as feignings, his religious practices are understood as having been undertaken strictly for the sake of others, and his “secret” erotic visions simply go unrecorded. Ramakrishna the Tāntrika, about whom “everything is secret,”<sup>156</sup> is no more. Ramakrishna the Incarnation is now the only real Ramakrishna, the god-man who “comes in secret.”<sup>157</sup>

#### CONCLUSION: THE TONGUE AND THE TRADITION

Given all of this, I would posit a secret with two primary levels: the Tantric and the incarnational. Both the secret’s content and its interpretation seem to have changed over time, swinging back and forth between these Tantric and incarnational meanings. The secret’s earliest strata, as recorded in the texts of Datta and Gupta, seem to have been primarily Tantric, although even here there are clear hints of an incarnational dimension. There are secret-talk passages in the *Kathāmṛta*, for example, that speak of Ramakrishna’s hidden divinity and the “secret” nature of his coming.<sup>158</sup> Nevertheless, Tantra is clearly the primary focus of Ramakrishna’s early textual secrets. This primacy of Tantra was no doubt rooted in Ramakrishna’s own biography, for the saint’s Tantric practices occurred very early in his life and constituted the foundation—structurally, doctrinally, and mystically—of the rest

<sup>156</sup> In KA 4.166, Ramakrishna describes a Tāntrika as someone who cannot be understood because “everything about [him] is secret.”

<sup>157</sup> A variant of the LP phrase *guptabhāve āse* also occurs in KA 2.16: *gopāne āse*.

<sup>158</sup> See, e.g., *ibid.* 2.205, 3.121, 3.179, 3.251, 4.101.

of his career. Accordingly, many of Ramakrishna's reminiscences concerning this early period of his religious practices are preceded by the heading *pūrvakathā* (talk about the past). They are thus prior, certainly in a chronological sense and, I would argue, most likely in a developmental one as well. At some point, as Ramakrishna's ecstasies and visions were witnessed and interpreted by a community of disciples, Ramakrishna's secret undergoes a transformation: a series of mystico-erotic experiences become the grounds for Ramakrishna's incarnational status. Ramakrishna, through a complex social process of interpretation and appropriation, is declared to be an Incarnation of God. By the time we get to Saradananda's *Lilāprasaṅga* in 1911, the secret talk (*guhya kathā*) recorded so faithfully, if reluctantly, in Gupta's *Kathāmṛta* has become the hidden meanings (*gūḍha artha*) of the *Lilāprasaṅga*, Saradananda's term for those deepest levels of interpretation that are capable of uncovering Ramakrishna's status as an Incarnation of God. Ramakrishna is now identified with the divine king "who comes in secret" and is recognized by only a select few. In this process, the specifically Tantric dimensions of Ramakrishna's secret have been omitted or covered up and the incarnational aspects have been emphasized. The secret has changed.

The structures and styles of the *Kathāmṛta* and *Lilāprasaṅga* reflect this social process of interpretation and appropriation in that the "secrets" of the *Kathāmṛta*, like Ramakrishna's early mystical experiences and visions, offer very little self-interpretation, whereas the hidden meanings of the *Lilāprasaṅga* are explicitly interpretive. In the *Kathāmṛta*, and even in the *Lilāprasaṅga*, Ramakrishna confesses numerous times that he does not know what his own secret visions mean. Saradananda, on the other hand, believes that he does and does not hesitate to tell us—Ramakrishna is God. It is almost as if the secrets of the *Kathāmṛta* constituted a troubling dream-vision that the *Lilāprasaṅga* sought to interpret and, by so doing, transform its strange contents into something that could be more easily appropriated by the social and cultural worlds. What was reported as a private mystico-erotic experience was transformed into a publicly acknowledged theological state. Ramakrishna the Secret Tāntrika, who once ate with the dogs and saw God in a bitch's heat, became Ramakrishna the Hidden Incarnation, the pure soul "who never even dreamt of a woman."

Back and forth between the private and the public, between the Tantra of Datta and Gupta and the Vedānta of Saradananda, between the sometimes disgusting and the always respectable. Which is it? Or to put it in a way that will take us back to the beginning of this essay: is Kālī "sticking out" her tongue because she is sexually aroused? Or is she "biting" her tongue in a public display of shame and embarrassment? I would

conclude that, at least in the life and teachings of Ramakrishna and in the subsequent textual history of the Ramakrishna tradition, both interpretations are equally appropriate, for taken together they speak of the ambiguous legacy of Tantra in Bengali culture. Society may have insisted, in the form of Ramakrishna's conscience, that he not speak, that he remain silent: "it is as if someone were holding my mouth shut," he reported. But, driven by the secret goddess, Ramakrishna spoke anyway. He told his Tantric secrets with a tongue that was as much Kālī's as it was his own. In many ways, the texts of Datta, Gupta, and Saradananda are expressions of that same troubled tongue. Their secret talk, hidden meanings, and historical patterns of revealing and concealing impressively replicate on a textual dimension the ambivalence and reluctance embodied in Kālī's tongue, extended to both express and destroy the bonds of "shame, disgust, and fear."

*Westminster College, New Wilmington, Pennsylvania*



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# MANLINESS AND IMPERIAL SERVICE IN MUGHAL NORTH INDIA

BY

ROSALIND O'HANLON

(Clare College, Cambridge)

## *Abstract*

This essay explores some of the ways in which gender identity and norms for manhood were important in the political and religious discourses of Mughal north India. A concern with the meanings of manhood ran through these discourses and their antecedents in the wider world of medieval Perso-Islamic political culture, constructing important and enduring links between kingship, norms for statecraft, imperial service and ideal manhood. The essay examines in detail the ways in which one high imperial servant in the early seventeenth century inherited, developed and reflected on these themes, and related them to his own personal experience. These definitions of elite manliness began to change in the later seventeenth century, and their connection with imperial service began to fracture, with the emergence of more complexly stratified urban societies in north India, and the development of an increasingly ebullient and cosmopolitan ethos of gentlemanly connoisseurship and consumption. The essay examines some of the normative literature associated with these shifts, and suggests that one of their consequences may have been to intensify the strains in Mughal service morale associated with the last decades of the seventeenth century.

## *Introduction*

In the last decade, historians of India in search of new insights into social change have turned increasingly to the study of women and gender. Here as in many other fields of historical study, however, 'gender' here has tended to mean women.<sup>1</sup>) Women are assumed to be the 'carriers' of gender, because their reproductive role is held to define their place in society. Men's nature, on the other hand, is felt to be vested not so much in their bodies, as is their capacity for reason, reflection and understanding. Men thus become for us the norm, the universal subjects of history, against which women, children and others less complete in their humanity should be measured. These presuppositions about men and women have existed in different forms in many cultural

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1) There is now a very large literature on women in Indian society from the late eighteenth century. An excellent introduction to this is still the collection of essays in Sangari and Vaid 1989.



traditions, and have very often formed the basis on which much more complex hierarchies of gender have been elaborated. As John Tosh and others have argued, a particular consequence of these broad associations has been to make masculinity socially invisible.<sup>2)</sup> Thus, we very rarely look at men as gendered beings and gendered bodies: at what psychic and social investments sustain their sense of themselves as men, at what bodily meanings and expressions masculine identity may entail, at what networks and commonalities bring men together on the basis of shared gender identity, and what set them apart.

Masculinity might be defined, then, as that aspect of a man's social being which is gendered: which defines him as a man and links him to other men, and conditions other aspects of his identity, such as of class, occupation, race, ethnicity or age. Defining masculinity in this way does not, however, imply that it is some kind of universal essence, to be sought out and identified whatever the cultural context. The purpose is rather to explore the ways in which the qualities, behaviours and roles associated with manliness have been defined in different historical contexts, how these have been selectively linked with particular social groups, and employed to create hierarchies of various different kinds, both between men and women, and amongst men. These cross-cutting identities contain a further complexity, in that the category of 'man' itself may be inclusive as well as exclusive, and refer in some contexts to men and women in general, considered in relation to other orders of being. This ambiguity emerges particularly strongly in the political and ethical discourses on the nature of human perfectibility which have featured so largely in both Western and Islamic philosophical traditions. Many strands in each consider the possibilities for human moral growth in ways which appear to include women, but which in practice identify human virtue in masculine terms.<sup>3)</sup> Cultural understandings of what constitutes 'manhood' in its various forms have also differed very widely, as have assumptions about its consequences for individual temperament, behaviour and bodily experience. In the case of nineteenth century Britain, for example, historians have explored a shift in the codes of manliness current among governing and professional classes during the later nineteenth century. These codes moved from the moral earnestness of the Evangelicals and Dr Arnold, with their emphases on moral courage, sexual purity and civic virtue, to the muscular and 'imperial' masculinity of the 1890's.<sup>4)</sup> But wherever manhood is associated with power, however loosely or variably, it becomes also a public social status which must be striven for and maintained in specific

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2) Tosh 1994, p. 180.

3) See, for example, Ahmed 1992, pp. 39-125.

4) Mangan and Walvin 1987, pp. 1-7; Roper and Tosh 1991.

social contexts, and to which the recognition of peers is essential. Thus the concept of masculinity is inherently relational in two senses. It is not only perceived differences from women that define and sustain its meaning, but also the recognition and affirmation of other men.<sup>5)</sup> As R.W. Connell has argued, moreover, codes of masculinity in most societies have their own pecking order: some are superior to others. Ruling groups not only valorise particular features of their own masculine code; they often stigmatise others as marginal, deviant or criminal, particularly those which seem to undermine or discredit men more generally as possessing a proper authority over women.<sup>6)</sup> Sexuality is perhaps the most obvious register here, given the formal stigmatisation of homosexuality evident in many political and religious traditions, but other registers—of class, culture, race, ethnicity or age—may equally feature in the construction of ‘low’ forms of manhood.<sup>7)</sup>

Thus relationally conceived, the wider social elaboration of these codes for men as well as women, their construction in realms of economy and polity as well as of kinship systems and households, constitute major themes in the study of gender. As Joan Scott has reminded us, however, gender is not only an immediate dimension of social relationships in this way; it acts also as a wider and particularly potent means of signifying relationships of power in much more general ways.<sup>8)</sup> This is because the conceptual languages required in these processes establish their meanings through differentiation, and sexual difference represents an immediately available and pervasively familiar way of establishing differentiation. It works most strongly, of course, wherever the meanings of masculine and feminine are most categorically polarised, and distinctive sexual roles for men and women themselves affirmed and elaborated. Most significantly, the relations, institutions or other phenomena whose meanings are affirmed in this way may often have nothing directly to do with sexed bodies. In the South Asian context, for example, relations between king, court and temple, the distribution of roles in agricultural labour, the nature of relations between imperial powers and colonial subjects, even the qualities of particular landscapes and ecological systems have all been areas where sex-related differences between bodies have been invoked to construct meaning, difference and, usually, hierarchy.<sup>9)</sup> What makes this mode of establishing difference so

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5) Tosh 1994, pp. 183-5. See also Kimmel 1987 and Connell 1995 for an appraisal of recent models for the study of masculinity.

6) Connell 1995, pp. 76-81.

7) For transgressive sexualities in a range of cultural contexts, see Maccubin 1987; Hinsch 1990; and Murray and Roscoe 1997.

8) Scott 1986.

9) For the sexualisation of court culture in medieval South India, see Narayana Rao et al.

pervasive and attractive, moreover, is that its origins lie seemingly in an unalterable world of nature, beyond human challenge or power to change. Whilst analytically separate, these two levels at which gender works are interrelated, its symbolic content shaped by and in turn shaping more immediate social roles and codes.

This essay explores some of the ways in which gender identity and norms for manhood were important in the political and religious discourses of Mughal north India. Here, as Sanjay Subrahmanyam has recently remarked, the study of broader social and cultural themes still remains poorly integrated into political and economic histories of the period.<sup>10</sup>) I argue that a concern with the meanings of ideal manhood ran through through these discourses and their antecedents in the wider world of medieval Perso-Islamic political culture, constructing important and enduring links between kingship, norms for statecraft, imperial service and ideal manhood. These links were already established in the traditions of moral and political theory inherited from the Delhi Sultanate, and it was a critical part of Akbar's political project to strengthen them. I examine in detail the ways in which one high imperial servant in this period developed and reflected on these themes, and related them to his own personal experience. I explore some of the ways in which definitions of elite manliness may have begun to change in the later seventeenth century, and their connection with imperial service to fracture, with the emergence of more complexly stratified urban societies in north India, and the development of an increasingly ebullient and cosmopolitan ethos of gentlemanly connoisseurship and consumption. I look at some of the normative literature associated with these shifts, and suggest that one of their consequences may have been to intensify the strains in Mughal service morale associated with the last decades of the seventeenth century. I conclude with brief comparative reflections on these links in other early modern states.

### *Gender and the Meanings of Manliness in Mughal North India*

The north Indian context naturally reveals enormous regional complexity and marked changes over time, both in the range of codes and roles associated

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1992, pp. 169-219; for gender-based taboos in agriculture, fishing and hunting, see Agarwal 1994, pp. 312-315. Sinha 1995 analyses the use of sexual language in representing British authority in India. For discussion of the feminising effects of climate and landscape, see Marshall and Williams 1982, pp. 129-38. These connections between sexual identity and landscape are not exclusively European: for a South Asian example which makes similar links between wetness, fecundity and the feminine, see Feldhaus 1995.

10) Subrahmanyam 1992a, pp. 292-3.

with manhood, and in the wider deployment of sexual meanings to create difference and hierarchy. Yet there are also a range of common themes, reflecting processes of cultural adaptation and fusion.<sup>11)</sup> High profile codes of martial honour were shared widely amongst specialist military communities; these overlapped, but did not always coincide with the closely guarded sexual honour of patriarchal householders. Great exemplars were naturally important in defining what it meant to be an ideal man, whether as ruler, warrior, householder or lover. Some of these great exemplars, such as Ali, son-in law of the Prophet, belonged to the great religious traditions of India.<sup>12)</sup> Other ideals emerged in classics of Persian literature, such as the great romantic epic of Layla and Majnun, or Firdawsi's celebration of heroism and tragedy in the *Shāh'nāmāh*.<sup>13)</sup> North Indian oral literatures suggested some models, while others derived from more local histories of virtuous rulership, exemplary courage or extraordinary devotion.<sup>14)</sup> Other traditions, such as those of the great warrior ascetic communities of north India, or the Islamic ideal of the *ghāzī* as holy warrior, defined manliness more in terms of self-control and bodily renunciation, and placed a greater emphasis on disciplines of the body as the means to greater spiritual and physical strength.<sup>15)</sup> Cross-cutting these particularist traditions were normative constructs of more general application, such as the central Islamic conception of *ādāb*, at once moral training, cultivation of manner, bodily discipline and spiritual refinement, that represented an ideal for every cultured Muslim of west Asia, and that extended to women as well as men. Every serious occupation and activity had its own particular appropriate *ādāb*, its own way of fusing together practical action and spiritual meaning. In more cosmopolitan cultural settings, *ādāb* also denoted a generalised ideal of civilised and cultured behaviour in which non-Muslim men could share, which grew out of the

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11) For an introduction to the small literature on South Asian themes which does exist, see Sinha 1995. Carstairs 1970 focusses on modern Hindu understandings of adult manhood, and contains some essential insights. Psychoanalytic perspectives are insightfully employed in Kakar and Ross 1986, and Kakar 1989.

12) Bulliet 1979, pp. 64-79 and Schimmel 1987, pp. 217-220 discuss the popular diffusion of names such as Ali as an index of their status as exemplars.

13) For these models, see Kakar and Ross 1986, pp. 42-73. Davidson 1994 discusses ideals of kingship and heroism in the *Shāh'nāmāh*.

14) See Blackburn et al. 1994, for exemplars in Indian oral epics, and for a local north Indian example, see the canonisation of the Bangash warrior Dalel Khān in Bundelkhand, in Irvine 1878, pp. 365-371. Irvine reported that at the age of 12, every Bundela boy was taken to Dalel Khān's tomb, his sword and shield placed on the tomb before being girded on, so that he might absorb the dead hero's qualities.

15) For these warrior and monastic communities, see Ghurye 1964; Kolff 1971, pp. 213-8; Lorenzen 1978, pp. 61-75; van der Veer 1989, pp. 458-70; Pinch 1996.

infusion of all mundane activity with spiritual awareness.<sup>16)</sup> Underpinning these constructs were often elaborate and culturally pervasive understandings of the body, its sophisticated systems of humours, vital energies and emotions, the best means of keeping them in equilibrium and of refining and concentrating them to create extraordinary powers. These understandings were clearly informed by a range of biomedical traditions, notably Ayurvedic theory and the Indian Unani legacy of Graeco Arabic humoral medicine. At the same time, there were important common themes here: the idea that powers and faculties are acquired through techniques of the body, the doctrine of bodily health as an equilibrium of internal humours dependent on the right balance between heat and cold, dryness and moisture, the minute analysis of the qualities of particular foods, aromas and essences in maintaining this balance, the sense of an intimate connection between temperament, bodily constitution and physical environment.<sup>17)</sup>

There were also significant parallels in the way that masculinity and the male body were constructed in the multiple religious cultures of north India. Male spiritual power and bodily comportment were key issues for many forms of sufi devotionism as much as for Brahmanic traditions of *brahmachāryā*. This is made clear in the elaboration of somatic and sexual disciplines in the normative literature of sufi masters, which reflected in part the tension between sufi emphases on asceticism and renunciation, and the Islamic scriptural requirement that all adult Muslims should marry.<sup>18)</sup> Both local Hindu and Islamic forms of devotionism oscillated between extreme forms of hierarchy and separation in gender roles, and moments when these boundaries were blurred and transgressed. Thus the upsurge of devotionism in medieval Hinduism enshrined Rama and Krishna not only as compelling figures in popular worship, but as great exemplars, whose qualities of selfless courage, spiritual strength or playful inventiveness were celebrated repeatedly in the oral literatures of north India such as the pervasively popular *Rāmcharitramānās*.<sup>19)</sup> Islamic devotion-

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16) Metcalf 1984, pp. 2-5.

17) For patterns of cross-fertilisation between Indian, Greek and Persian humoral traditions, see Filloziat 1964, pp. 196-279. For humoral aspects of Ayurvedic theory, see Zimmerman 1987, and in Indian Unani medicine, Azmi 1995, pp. 93-119; Ullman 1978 pp. 55-71; and Bagchi 1997, pp. 71-81. Relations between late pre-colonial Indian and Western medical traditions are described in Pearson 1995, pp. 141-170. For the domestication of humoral medicine in wider Asian contexts, see Good and Good 1992, pp. 257-71, and Laderman 1992, pp. 272-88.

18) See, for example, Lawrence 1994, pp. 152-5; Schimmel 1979, pp. 122-30. For a general history of sufism in India, see Rizvi 1983. For sexuality and marriage in medieval Islamic societies, see Bouhdiba 1985, pp. 88-100.

19) Lutgendorf 1989, pp. 34-61.

ism often elaborated similarly polarised roles for men and women, based on the idea that women's procreative function made them particularly vulnerable to the *nafs* or lower self, unlike men, whose superior qualities of intellect or '*aql*' render them better able to control their own *nafs*.<sup>20</sup>) As Annemarie Schimmel has argued, the true hero of sufism is the 'man,' *fatā*, *mard*, *javānmard*, and many sufis compared the *nafs* to a wayward woman seeking to entrap the striving soul on its path to God.<sup>21</sup>) Not only worship, but all worldly activity could be classified on elaborate grids of sexual difference. Thus for the thirteenth century Indian mystic Jamal Hānswī, 'The seeker of the world is feminine, the seeker of the other world is a hermaphrodite, and the seeker of the Lord is masculine.'<sup>22</sup>)

At the same time, these spiritual discourses could apparently make such distinctions more permeable, or appear to transcend them altogether. Drawing on other qualities imputed to women, their ability to inspire and experience particularly intense love, sufi religiosity often represented its saints as the adoring brides of God. In Indian sufism, the *nafs* became the equivalent of the Hindu *virāhīnī*, the loving spouse parted from her Lord, just as Vaishnava devotees sometimes expressed their passionate love in the feminine imagery of Radha and the *gōpī* playmates of Lord Krishna.<sup>23</sup>) Sufi religious thought could appear to transcend these distinctions altogether, as concern with the nature of ideal manhood shaded naturally into reflection on the possibilities for human perfection more generally. Thus later sufi thought often represented man as journeying spiritually through a long series of 'unveilings,' in which a select few would finally recognise the divine image within themselves. Particularly associated with the great thirteenth century mystic Ibn 'Arabī, this doctrine distinguished the 'perfect man,' *insān kāmīl*, from all other conscious beings—men, women, lesser forms of life—who were content with low levels of spiritual awareness and concerned only with the mundane and material levels of existence. Thus only a tiny proportion of men were actually 'true' men, marked out by their willingness to endure every kind of pain and hardship on the journey to ultimate spiritual illumination and union with the divine love.<sup>24</sup>) Here, then, the juxtaposition between men and women seemed to be suspended in favour of an

20) Lawrence 1994, p. 153.

21) Schimmel 1980, pp. 428-29 and Schimmel 1979, pp. 136-40.

22) Schimmel 1979, p. 130.

23) For permeable gender boundaries in South Asian religious traditions, see Singer 1966; Schimmel 1980, pp. 139-41; Hildebeitel 1980-81; Kakar and Ross 1986, pp. 74-103; Goldman 1993; Gupta 1993; Lawrence 1994.

24) For discussion of these themes in sufi thought, see Naimuddin 1971; Chittick 1979; Schimmel 1989.

essentially spiritual distinction between the illuminated few and the many still besotted with the world. Saintly women might attain to these forms of perfection, which were generically human rather than specifically masculine in character. At some level, however, the *insān kāmīl* remained in ambiguous senses essentially a man. Women could come to possess those qualities of body and spirit, but this very often meant that they could no longer be considered mere women. They were praiseworthy precisely because they were so unlike the generality of their sex. As the great thirteenth century mystic Fāriduddin 'Attār asserted: "When a woman walks in the way of God like a man, she cannot be called a woman."<sup>25</sup>)

The emergence of Indo-Persian court culture in north India during the period of the Delhi Sultanate provided another critical arena for the elaboration of codes defining manliness, *javānmardī*, and norms of comportment for the male body. In this context too, it is the parallels and cultural fusions in political idiom that are striking, as much as the differences of region or cultural tradition. Here, the power of the male body was much more an outwardly directed and expressive one, based less on the concentration of inner energies and more on the intensely public enactment of universal kingship in the rituals of display, consumption and gifting that were central to the political culture of the Delhi Sultanate. Patrimonial themes featured importantly in the public construction of royal authority: the king was at once father to all of his subjects and husband to the wider realm. The image of the kingdom as household extended also to the households of great nobles, with their own circles of clients, servants, and dependents.<sup>26</sup>) Gifts of ceremonial dress, signifying the incorporation of these clients and servants into the king's body, transmitted his own forms of patrimonial authority, and confirmed their recipients in their own more localised forms of power over lesser courts and households.<sup>27</sup>) Conspicuous consumption was fundamental to these forms of authority, not only to affirm its magnificence, but to demonstrate its benevolent and fructifying power throughout the realm by distribution of wealth in exchange for the wares of all of its subjects.<sup>28</sup>) Many

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25) Quoted in Schimmel 1975, p. 426. These ambiguities have continued to shape discussion of the place of women in sufi tradition: see Schimmel 1982.

26) For a 'patrimonial-bureaucratic' model of Mughal imperial authority, see Blake 1979, pp. 77-94. For more general histories of the culture of the imperial court, see M. Athar Ali 1997; Richards 1993. For a survey of the literature, see Subrahmanyam 1992a.

27) For these aspects of ritual incorporation, see Buckler 1927-8, pp. 238-48, and Cohn 1989, pp. 312-6. For the construction of imperial authority in north India more generally, see Richards 1978, pp. 252-85.

28) Bayly 1986, pp. 297-302.

elements in the political discourse of the Sultanate—Persian ‘mirrors for princes’ works, *akhlāq* literature, sufi conceptions of the ‘ideal man,’ *insān kāmil*, classical Sanskrit precepts of statecraft—also constructed links between kingship, the service of kings and norms for ideal manhood in the range of senses discussed above.<sup>29)</sup> From the late sixteenth century, these gendered idioms of kingship were elaborated in important new ways. Akbar and his court supporters sought to strengthen these associations between imperial service and ideal manhood, and to make them a more public and explicit part of court culture. Reworked bodily and sexual codes for imperial servants emphasised the possibilities for moral and human perfection in all of the homologous worlds that men inhabited as governors: the kingdom, the household and the body. These eclectic norms for ideal manhood were intended both to transcend differences of law and religion, caste and region, and to present imperial service as the best—indeed the only—medium for its realisation. This strategy in turn formed a part of the wider Mughal project to create a new north Indian cultural synthesis. These north Indian models of patriarchal and heterosexual male virtue were contrasted with the transgressive and debased practices of outsiders from beyond the Oxus, or of the southern, Iranian-influenced courts of the Deccan.<sup>30)</sup>

These perspectives open up new possibilities for the understanding of a range of issues in social life, politics and the state in Mughal India. This essay explores the way in which particular individuals in imperial service negotiated these bodily codes, and employed wider idioms of sexual difference in their understanding of imperial authority and imperial service. The essay also suggests some of the ways in which these codes and idioms may have changed between the early-seventeenth century high point of Mughal imperial power to its period of crisis and disintegration in the first decades of the eighteenth. The work of John Richards in particular here has been helpful in exploring the codes of honour, loyalty and dignified subordination which informed Mughal imperial service, and particularly the shift from the intense emotional tie of discipleship as it developed under Akbar, to the more generalised ethic of loyalty and hereditary service embodied in the ideal of the *khānazād*.<sup>31)</sup> Yet these codes were not only about honour, service and dignified subordination. They were also about the meanings of ideal manliness, the bodily disciplines which helped develop them, and the possession of the right qualities of affability, tact, attentiveness and decorum which a successful man needed to forge networks of

29) For these themes, see Nizami 1961 and Habib and Khan 1967.

30) O’Hanlon (forthcoming).

31) See in particular Richards 1984, pp. 255-289.



friendship and alliance in the overwhelmingly male public world of imperial officers. Attention to these themes, and to the wider use in these contexts of a naturalising language of sexual difference, may provide new insights into the construction of imperial authority and the relationships amongst imperial servants which helped to sustain it.

There are difficulties of evidence here, of course. Familiar sources tell us about the qualities of the ideal imperial servant, as in Abū'l Faḥr's prefatory discussion to the *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, itself a synthesis of some of the normative discourses described above. Contemporary values can be extrapolated from a range of other important normative genres. Sufi *malfūẓāt* literature, the recorded table-talk of sufi masters, is useful here, as are the rich traditions of Persian ethical and political writing about the ethical basis of state power and the virtues appropriate to rulers.<sup>32)</sup> For images of man as ideal lover, the classics of Persian poetry that were deemed an essential part of an educated man's literary repertoire form a rich source.<sup>33)</sup> Perhaps most importantly, Mughal architecture and painting represents an enormously valuable source for the representation of imperial authority and the values of ideal rulership, but one which social and political historians have yet to develop and use.<sup>34)</sup> What is more difficult is to find the self-accounts of individual high imperial servants which go beyond these public expressions and make explicit their sense of what imperial service meant for their own personal ways of defining or affirming qualities of manliness or masculine virtue.

### *Reworking Tradition: Muhammad Bāqir Najm-i Ṣānī*

One possible source lies in the life and writing of Muhammad Bāqir Najm-i Ṣānī, descendant of Amīr Yār Muhammad Khān Najm-i Ṣānī, the powerful *vākīl* of the founder of the Safavid dynasty, Shāh Ismā'īl Safavi. Muhammad Bāqir came from Persia to India in dire financial straits either towards the end of Akbar's reign or at the beginning of Jahāngīr's, during the period of Shāh 'Abbās's drive to limit the political and commercial activities of Tajik elites in the Safavid state. Linked to the ruling family through his marriage to the niece of Nūr Jahān, he rose rapidly through the imperial service under Jahāngīr and

32) For sufi literature in north India, see Rizvi 1983; for ethical and political writings, see Lambton 1981.

33) For this imagery, see Yarshater 1986, pp. 971-6.

34) For introductions to Mughal painting, see Okada 1992; Beach 1992; Beach and Koch 1997; and for architecture, Asher 1995.

Shāh Jahān, serving as governor of Patna, Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, Gujrat, Delhi, Jaunpur and Allahabad, until his death in 1637.<sup>35</sup>) In the biographical dictionary of Shāhnavāz Khān, Bāqir emerges as a man both of pen and sword. A seasoned soldier, 'he was unequalled for courage and he was the first of his age for military skill.' Exemplars were important for him: he loved to hear the sound of the trumpet, he always said, because Rustam used to listen to it.<sup>36</sup>) He was extremely capable in political affairs and was not only well versed in music, literature and philosophy, but wrote himself a range of prose, poetry and theological works.<sup>37</sup>)

What makes Bāqir such a useful source of insights into contemporary definitions of manliness is that he also reflected in a wide ranging and systematic way on his experience as an ambitious emigre imperial servant, and on the insights that this gave him into the proper conduct of statecraft, and the best strategies for a man's survival in the competitive world of imperial service. Through his long career, he also made a particular point of collecting precious ideas, sayings and maxims from a wide range of Persian, Arabic and Indian sources.<sup>38</sup>) He assembled these together into a book, the *Mau'izah-i Jahāngirī*, 'Admonition of Jahāngir,' completing the work probably in 1612.<sup>39</sup>) He named the book after his patron Jahāngir, but there is no evidence that the book was ever presented to the Emperor. It was divided into two parts. The first, 'On the Exhortation of Emperors' ranged over the qualities rulers needed if they were to govern successfully: generosity, bravery, forbearance; personal discipline in governing passions and the senses; the right balance between kingly dignity and the kind of personal affability needed to draw friends; a sense of timing in dealing with enemies, of when to be lenient and when to punish. The second half of the book, 'The Admonition of Subordinates and Peers' set out the qualities and etiquettes, the *ādāb*, which emperors should cultivate and encourage in imperial servants. Bāqir used this second half of his book to define his sense of the connection

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35) See Alvi 1989, pp. 11-13. The emperor Jahāngir also refers to him frequently in his autobiography: *Tūzūk-i Jahāngirī*, Rogers and Beveridge 1978. He also features prominently in the *Ma'aṣir al-umarā*, the biographical dictionary of Shāhnavāz Khān, 1888, pp. 408-12. For these waves of Irani and Tajik migration see Subrahmanyam 1992b.

36) *Ma'aṣir al-umarā*, vol. 1, p. 411.

37) For Bāqir's literary and religious concerns, see Alvi 1979; Alam and Subrahmanyam 1996, p. 178.

38) Thus, for example, as governor of Orissa he detained the traveller Mahmūd Balkhī at his court so that the latter could translate treatises on 'Practical Wisdom,' *hikmat-i 'amālī*, from Arabic into Persian. Alam and Subrahmanyam 1996, p. 178.

39) See Alvi 1979, for an edition of the Persian text, with a translation and extensive introductory essay.

between the *ādāb* of personal striving and devotion in the service of kings, and the particular qualities of ideal manliness, *javānmardī*, through which an individual might cultivate it.

As a cultured and widely read state servant, Bāqir was naturally familiar with the genres of normative literature discussed above, with their already established sense of the connections between kingship, the service of kings and ideal manhood. In reworking these genres and collecting his 'precious ideas,' he took full advantage of their range and depth. Many parts of his text reflect sufi influences. There are frequent references to the journey which must be undertaken by the striving soul, and to the willingness to endure constant effort and hardship to reach his goal which sets the 'true' man, *mard*, apart from lesser human beings lacking in spiritual awareness or desire for moral elevation.<sup>40)</sup> These questions about the conditions for human perfection naturally led to questions of politics, and what kind of ruler, polity and social order was best calculated to promote the moral perfection of subjects. One route towards this lay in neoplatonic traditions of reflection on ideal rulership and human perfectibility. These were available to Bāqir most easily through the medieval Muslim tradition of writing on *akhlāq*, ethics or morals, which in the work of Naṣīr ud-Dīn Tūsī in particular had enjoyed considerable popularity at the court of Akbar.<sup>41)</sup> Other textual references are to rather different genres dealing with statecraft. His text reveals clear borrowings from the classic moral tales of Kalilah and Dimnah, with their extended reflections on wisdom in statecraft and strategies for success in imperial service, and their own references to manliness, as a kind of intense moral ambition, the natural drive of those with talent to rise to rank and eminence.<sup>42)</sup> Bāqir was also familiar with the eleventh and twelfth century Iranian classics in the genre of 'mirrors for princes,' such as the *Qābūs Nāmah* of Kaykā'ūs, al-Ghazālī's *Naṣīhat al-Mulūk*, and Niẓām al-Mulk's *Siyāsat Nāmah*. Thus, Bāqir emphasised the set of universal virtues that was appropriate to rulers: of generosity, bravery (*shujā'at*) and high-mindedness (*himmat-i buland*). For Bāqir too, justice was central to the success of the state, and the ability to enforce it an indispensable quality of rulers. The language he used was also a shared one. A range of terms was employed here to describe the qualities of ideal manliness. Thus al-Ghazālī devoted a chapter to *dar bulandī-yi himmat-i pādshāhān*, 'On magnanimity in Kings,' defined as *khvīsh-tan-dāri* . . .

40) For sufism in the early modern Indian context, see Schimmel 1975, pp. 344-402.

41) *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, vol. 1, Ā'in 34. For an introduction to *akhlāq* literature, see Hardy 1977-8 and Lambton 1981, pp. 103-129.

42) Irving 1980, pp. 4-5, 111.

*wa pur-dili*, 'self restraint and courage.'<sup>43</sup>) Many of his anecdotes illustrated the personal munificence of successful rulers, their desire to relieve subjects from want and care with a single great gesture. In other contexts, however, where personal spirit and willingness to take risks were at issue, the term used was *javānmard*, literally 'young man,' but with the implication of a particular ideal of generosity, bravery and spirit. Thus, for al-Ghazālī, the qualities of the *javānmard* were evident in his example of the adventurous nobleman who forged his way into the court of a great patron, then risked all by declaring his deception, or in the patron who refused to take back the largesse bestowed on servants even when the latter turned out not to need them.<sup>44</sup>) For Kaykā'ūs in his *Qābūs Nāmah*, *javānmardī* was identified particularly with the personal nobility—of bravery, self-restraint, truthfulness and endurance—of soldiers.<sup>45</sup>) This was the term also that Bāqir himself most often employed to denote the kind of spirited and generous manliness which he associated so strongly with the pursuit of eminence and success in the service of kings.

In celebrating these qualities of *javānmardī*, it is also important to note, Bāqir not only drew on political discourses inherited from the Delhi Sultanate, but connected himself to a much wider set of gendered practices in Middle Eastern Islamic society. For the aristocracy of medieval Persia, *javānmardī* represented the translation of the older Arab-Islamic principle of *futuwwa*, from *fatā'*, literally 'young man,' connoting a man youthful and vigorous, stout-hearted in warfare, gallant and generous in his treatment of others weaker than himself. In medieval Islam, the figure of Ali gradually emerged as the great exemplar, the *fatā'* par excellence. Over time, however, the principle of *futuwwa* became elaborately embodied in a whole variety of urban community organisations, usually of young men, that developed as a fundamental element in the structure of medieval Middle Eastern society, and were often strongly influenced by sufi ideals of corporate living and personal virtue.<sup>46</sup>) In part, *futuwwa* here represented an urban expression of the more fundamental concept of '*aṣabīyyah*, the moral solidarity of the group in the Islamic polity made famous in Ibn Khaldun's interpretation of history and theory of the state. '*Aṣabīyyah* represented the general notion of such solidarity, and *futuwwa* the qualities of individual members through which it might be achieved. With their defining commitment to comradeship, mutual loyalty and striving for moral perfection,

43) *Naṣīhat al-Mulūk*, tr. Bagley 1964, p. 119.

44) *Ibid.*, pp. 127-31.

45) *Qābūs Nāmah*, Levy 1951, p. 139.

46) For links between sufi orders and the medieval *futuwwa* corporations, see Schimmel 1975, pp. 245-7.

these corporations embedded themselves in local societies in a wide range of different ways: sometimes as guild organisations, sometimes as the social framework for sufi solidarities, sometimes as local militia whose military and sporting training made them valuable allies for city authorities and claimants to state power alike. The *futuwwa* also developed a range of courtly as well as popular forms, possessed strong codes of sexual honour, and generated rituals of initiation and corporate bonding.<sup>47)</sup> The Persian normative discourse of *javānmardī*, then, connected with these older and very widely diffused principles of male solidarity, honour, bravery and generosity, and was echoed in the normative literary genres discussed above.

While Bāqir thus situated himself within a textual tradition which already linked kingship, the service of kings and the nature of ideal manhood, he also sought to rework many of its elements. He dispensed with animal fables, anecdotes, and romances as a means of exemplifying his moral perspectives, and with the historical experience of past rulers that figured so strongly as a means of imparting advice in the work of al-Ghazālī or Nizām al-Mulk. As we shall see, he spoke rather in practical and direct terms, clearly related to his own experience as an ambitious and sometimes lonely emigre, striving to capture the mutable star of imperial favour, and to negotiate the rituals and pitfalls of court society. He put forward his own very clear sense of the best way for a ruler to manage his officers and clients: of the combination of kindness and severity needed to get the best out of servants, of the importance of matching individual men to their posts, and of the need to pay careful attention to these servants' own sense of their relative places in the court hierarchy. Likewise, loyal friends were valued not for abstract reasons, but for the very real ways in which they might bring solace to a man's life and provide help in his personal advancement. Here, the principle of solidarity between men powerfully invoked in the older discourses of *javānmardī* and *futuwwa*, take on an immediate and practical significance. Bāqir's discussion of wealth and poverty, and his poignant description of the constant humiliations to which men without means were exposed in contemporary society, also read very much like the personal experience of a man who has known both. Also unlike many other works in the same genre, Bāqir did not devote a separate, formulaic chapter to describing the qualities of heroism, courage or magnanimity that defined successful and high ranking men. Rather, he integrated his account of what it meant to be 'a man,' *mard*, *javānmard*, into his broader discussion of the qualities needed for success in the serv-

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47) A good introductory discussion to the *futuwwa* is in Hodgson 1974, pp. 126-31. See also *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 'aṣabiyyah and *futuwwa*.

ice of kings. What emerged was his strong sense of an important practical association between the two: between a particular kind of manhood based on struggle and striving, and the drive for preeminence in imperial service.

Given these links, it was natural that Bāqir should open the important second half of his book with a discussion of the complex and delicate art of friendship. In placing friendship so centrally, he followed an established convention of the 'Mirrors' genre, which itself had well-established classical antecedents.<sup>48</sup>) Yet the detail and intensity of this part of his discussion, the forcefulness of his insistence that a circle of mutually committed friends was quite indispensable for an ambitious man's happiness and success, also suggests a connection with personal experience. The strength of Bāqir's insistence here also reflected the critical importance of the alternative and cross-cutting connections of family for a man's advancement in imperial service. To advocate the equal value of ties of friendship, Bāqir needed to suggest a particularly powerful ethos of mutual support, and the kind of intimacy that could only arise between men with a shared commitment to the struggle for eminence, and mutual concern for each other's inner and outer perfectibility as men. This was not simply the view of an emigre and outsider without family connections to sustain him: as we have seen, Bāqir had himself married directly into the imperial family. What is striking here, indeed, is the sense of intimacy about friendship in Bāqir's discussion, of the conviction not only that friends should be absolutely faithful allies in a man's worldly struggle for eminence, but that a critical part of this lay in a mutual concern and engagement with each other's inner qualities as men, with the effort to shape and perfect those qualities in what ought to be an ongoing struggle for personal reformation. Thus, friendship was very much the friendship of a group, who 'affiliate both in times of prosperity and adversity, affluence and impoverishment. Through adversities in fortune and calamities of Time, they stand by each other, sincere in helping to facilitate their [return to] successful, prosperous and affluent positions in society.'<sup>49</sup>) Since a man's circle of friends needed to serve so many different purposes, helping him to perfect his inner character as well as to succeed in outward terms, the business of choosing them was a matter of fine discrimination. Different men met different needs. Knowledgeable men were a source of happiness; men of particular virtue

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48) See, for example, Aristotle's discussion and classification of friendship in Book 7 of the *Eudemian Ethics*: Barnes 1984, vol. 2, pp. 1958-1981. Arabic versions of Aristotle's ethical works had been available to pre-Islamic moral writers in the Arab world, and were conveyed into Islamic moral thought during the great flowering of interest in works of Greek philosophy and science between the ninth and twelfth centuries.

49) Bāqir, pp. 78-9; 184. References here are to the English and then to the Persian text in Alvi's edition of the *Mau'izah*.

would take an interest in the inner struggle for self-perfection, and selfless men could be relied on always to be sincere. Conversely, the friendship of other kinds of people brought specific types of harm: sensualists would disturb a man's repose, hypocrites would 'incessantly tell untruthful stories about you and transmit them to other people,' and the foolish or stupid could cause harm even as they sought to do their friends favours.<sup>50)</sup> In making his choices, moreover, the wise man would remember that most friendships belonged to that larger class of things in the world that were simply impermanent, like 'the intimacy of rulers, the beauty of a beloved, the fidelity of women, the love of the insane, the generosity of intoxicated people, and the deception of enemies.'<sup>51)</sup> With this caution in mind, however, the prudent man would proceed to search out friends with the right qualities, who would earnestly point out his shortcomings and persuade him to reform, who would repeatedly praise his virtues, who would remember the favours he owed and stay true through the inevitable vicissitudes of friendship. These were the qualities, of constancy and fealty, which marked out 'the practice of manly (*javānmardī*)' and accomplished individuals.<sup>52)</sup> Interestingly in this context, Bāqir himself used the term *futuwwat* to describe the generous solidarities of this kind of comradeship: 'Therefore, when you find great generosity (*futuwwat*), fidelity, well-wishing, and affection in a friend, when you know that his love is free from hypocrisy and that you are benefitting from the fruits of friendship and affection, you must fully focus your attention on his friendship and love and must fulfill all social duties.'<sup>53)</sup> He emphasised the intense mutual concern that this kind of friendship should involve: 'Following an extended period of association and friendship, ask him about your drawbacks. In this probe, exercise extreme diligence and importunity. No matter how many times he says, "I see no shortcomings in you," do not accept it. Showing your disgust, repeat your question. When he mentions your faults to you, consider that a gesture of his deep concern for you, express your happiness, and endeavour to remove that shortcoming.'<sup>54)</sup>

From friendship, Bāqir moved to a discussion of wealth and poverty, and a forceful assertion that wealth alone enabled a man to live with dignity and success in the world. In this, of course, he set himself very much apart from the contemporary teaching of powerful sufi orders about the superior spiritual value

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50) Idem.

51) Ibid., p. 81; 186.

52) Ibid., p. 82; 188.

53) Ibid., pp. 83; 188-9.

54) Ibid., pp. 83-4; 189. Bāqir's emphasis on the moral scrutiny of friends is reminiscent of Abū'l Fazl's prescriptions for provincial governors: see *Ā'in-i Akbarī*, vol. 1, p. 281.

of poverty and austerity.<sup>55</sup>) Poverty he saw unambiguously as a source of disgrace and disaster. This was partly because for most men, poverty actually made it more likely that they would stray into crime. It was also that in the social world Bāqir felt he knew so well, people did not assess a man's actions for their intrinsic merit; rather, they interpreted what he did in the light of his material circumstances. In what seems to be a painfully felt assessment of his contemporaries' ways of measuring a man's worth, Bāqir explained that 'every quality for which the wealthy are admired and praised evokes condemnation and ridicule in the case of the impoverished.' What appeared as sterling virtue in the one attracted scorn and condemnation in the other. 'Bravery is considered impetuousness, generosity prodigality, and affability meekness and spiritlessness. If he discriminates in food and clothing, he is called self-indulgent; if he manages with a [mere] cloak and little food, he is seen as afflicted and indigent. If he settles in one place, he is branded a slave [to that place] and deemed ignorant of the world. If he resolves to travel, he is seen as stupefied, vagrant and unfortunate.'<sup>56</sup>)

If it was legitimate to pursue wealth, however, Bāqir was very careful to specify the purposes with which a man might do so. Wealth should never be viewed simply as a means to luxury or personal indulgence, nor should it be pursued avariciously, as an end in itself, since 'lust for luxury shows baseness and degradation.' Undertaken in the proper spirit, however, there was a wonderful connection between wealth and virtue. It was not only that wealth allowed a man to fulfil his own legitimate ambitions, to expand his talents and understanding, to ornament his dignity, and to make himself remembered by posterity. Properly pursued and used, wealth enabled a man to benefit his friends, clients and kinfolk. It meant he could to extend support, provision and largesse to a wide circle of needy and dependent, much as a single strong eagle could bring down prey and thereby make it possible for many other creatures to feed. Thus, it was a matter of shame that a man should lose himself 'in the pit of avarice and baseness,' when by exertion and struggle he could rise to the kind of preeminence that brought glory to himself and sustenance to others.<sup>57</sup>)

With this, Bāqir returned to his theme of manhood, and defined it as essentially a willingness to take part in the wider arena of struggle for advancement and power. 'One must remember that through striving an individual is led to his intended destination. Traversing with exertion the desert of endeavour brings

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55) For the growth of Naqshbandī influences under Akbar and Jahāngīr, see Rizvi 1995, pp. 176-260.

56) Bāqir, p. 86; 192.

57) Ibid., p. 87; 193.



into view the beauty of one's [desired] goals. Whoever raises the banner of struggle in the field of courage and in enduring afflictions eases his grip over physical comfort and leisure, reaches his destination sooner.'<sup>58</sup>) A man must be willing to tolerate privation, hardship and suffering: only then could he call himself a man: 'No one can achieve his objective and drink the wine of his goal from the goblet of his desire without enduring immeasurable suffering and tasting unpleasant dregs. [Indeed] he can be called a "man" who rises to seek his objective, tying round his waist the girdle of striving (*kamar-i sa'y bar miyān basta*) By keeping his aspiration high (*himmat buland dāshta*), he rejects base actions. By rejecting the goals of petty and lowly people, he does not stoop to trivial things like decrepit women ('*ajūz*').'<sup>59</sup>)

With this imagery of self-girding, evoked in explicit contrast to what was womanly and base, Bāqir also invoked a powerful set of connections between manliness and contemporary understandings of the male body, conventions of dress, and the *adab* of struggle and service. In these cultural terms, the strength of a man's waist and back were critical markers of his manliness, in a way which parallels the English sense of 'girding the loins,' but also goes beyond it. Thus a man who was *kamar band*, 'waist bound up,' signified one ready for action, service and battle. *Kamar basta* on its own also denoted bravery or heroism.<sup>60</sup>) Nor, it is worth bearing in mind, were these associations between manliness and strength of waist and back entirely arbitrary ones, in a military culture which placed such premium on the cavalryman's skills in wielding heavy weapons on horseback.<sup>61</sup>) *Sustī-yi kamar*, 'feeble waisted,' on the other hand, had the meaning not only of general debility in a man, but of actual sexual impotence.<sup>62</sup>) These meanings extended to forms of masculine dress, where the sash, *kamar band*, *kamar pesh* or *patkā* had developed as an important item of a man's public dress for attendance at court, and formed an essential component of the robes of honour conferred on imperial servants at court. Even in the stylised forms which the Mughal sash developed in the context of court rather than battlefield, it continued to signify a man's readiness for immediate action and service. It bound up his waist, it carried his dagger and other essential personal items, and, at the court of Bāqir's patron Jahāngīr in particular, its

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58) Idem.

59) Ibid., p. 88; 194.

60) Steingass, p. 1049. Thus nobles in attendance at court are frequently spoken of in contemporary sources as standing with waists girded up, ready for service: see, for example, Beach and Koch, p. 113.

61) For Mughal military drill and exercises designed to develop these strengths, see Irvine pp. 182-9; Phul pp. 49-52; Sharar, pp. 109-14.

62) Steingass, p. 681.

shape and decoration came to be powerful signifiers of personal allegiance. To appear in public assembly at court without one was virtually to appear in undress, and to imply refusal of service, even wilful contempt for authority: *kamar duzdidan*, 'stealing the sash' was to disobey or to refuse service.<sup>63</sup>) Rectitude in outer comportment was again intimately linked to a man's inner disposition.

Having invoked these compelling images, Bāqir returned to his theme of striving in the service of kings. Thus a man must be prepared to travel, 'if there is no possibility of ascendancy in one's own homeland,' and to endure the rending pain of separation from family and loved ones. Here again, the image of the eagle recurred, this time as the close companion of rulers: 'The reason that the wrist of the ruler is made the resting place of the eagle is that it does not lower its head into a nest.' So also must a man be prepared to travel far and fast, like an eagle, in pursuit of his goals.<sup>64</sup>) This was a spiritual as much as a physical journey, and here classic sufi themes and images emerge as he described the importance of journey and quest in marking out the 'true' man. The static tree falls victim to axe and saw; the constant movement of the sky, on the other hand, elevates it above all else. The striving soul, no less than the ambitious servant of kings, needed constantly to move onwards towards its goal.<sup>65</sup>) Most importantly, however, in this philosophy of striving and action for success in imperial service, true manhood itself came to be defined by willingness to take part: 'In sum, toiling is the vocation of valiant men and the occupation of the valorous. Only that individual can be considered a "man" who, renouncing his life, steps into the arena of "quest" and, not deterred by hard work, performs to expected and achievable levels of striving and endeavour.'

Either we step over the sky to achieve our goal  
Or we submit to the struggle like a 'man.'<sup>66</sup>)

Bāqir was also careful to include a caveat in this part of his discussion, to build a certain personal fortitude and imperviousness to fate's vicissitudes into his

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63) Steingass, p. 1049. For Mughal court dress, see Cohn 1989, pp. 312-6, and for court dress as an index of political affiliation in South India, Wagoner 1996, pp. 851-880. For a history of the sash, see Kahlenberg 1972, pp. 153-66. British colonial culture in India inherited this intense concern with the waist as a significant region of the body, to be protected by cholera belts from disease and flannel from heat. See Collingham 1997, p. 220.

64) Bāqir, p. 90; 196.

65) For these images in the great poet mystic Rumi and before him in the twelfth century court panegyrist Anvari, see Schimmel and Welch 1983, p. 90. Anvari's *qaṣida* on the poet's journey and the importance of travel featured in one of the illustrated *divān* specially created for Akbar.

66) Ibid., p. 91; 197.

definition of manhood. In his quest for glory, a man should also look beyond worldly power and eminence, and seek to develop higher qualities, such as were beyond the mutability of material success: 'Good speech, laudable actions, virtuous character, and good manners are territory immune from the catastrophes of fortune and reversions of Time.' The true man should also develop the personal fortitude that would enable him to encounter life's inevitable vicissitudes with dignified equanimity. Thus, 'the individual who gallops his steed of courage in the field of contentment should be considered a man. He is neither exhilarated on having material things, nor expresses regrets on their loss.'<sup>67)</sup>

If Bāqir said a lot about what it was to be a man, he also contrasted this with womanhood, in a range of interesting ways. At one level, his references to women strongly echoed the hostility to women of other works in the genre.<sup>68)</sup> Bāqir repeated their warnings about women's faithlessness, their intellectual weakness, their obsessions with worthless and petty things. As we have seen above, the striving of a man was contrasted with the trivialities with which women concerned themselves. As he elaborated these contrasts, Bāqir borrowed freely from such stock images of women. Thus women's loyalty and their physical charms belonged to the world of transitory things: 'the summer cloud, fragrance of a garden, beauty of comely faces, and the fidelity of women.'<sup>69)</sup> The company of women was amongst those things in the world that always entailed dangerous consequences: 'imperial service without peril; worldly wealth without pride; harmony without effort; company of women without disaster; and association with scoundrels without disgrace. No-one traverses the path of sensuality and does not fall to temptation. No man associates with a woman and is not carried away by diverse temptations.'<sup>70)</sup> In another very common image, the world of transitory material attractions was also an old, husband-killing woman, who 'displays herself to the people in the garb of newly-wed brides and entraps the hearts of unwise and haughty individuals with her short-lived charm and ephemeral adornments.'<sup>71)</sup>

At the same, time and in the light of his discussion of manhood, Bāqir may be here have been doing rather more than simply repeating the formulaic maledictions of the Persian literary tradition. For his theme here was not only the

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67) *Ibid.*, p. 95; 201.

68) For a discussion of this hostility in a range of medieval Iranian literatures, see Southgate 1984, pp. 417-25. For a broader discussion of traditions of bawdy and satirical writing in medieval Persian that have been suppressed by modern literary criticism, see Sprachmann 1995.

69) Bāqir, p. 98; 204.

70) *Ibid.*, p. 81; 177.

71) *Ibid.*, p. 97; 203.

contrast between women as a trivialising and deficient sex, and the men of endeavour and discernment who were drawn to the challenge of imperial service. The language of sexual difference served in much wider ways to give meaning to his vision of rulership and its service. Thus he presented the quest for rulership as itself very like the drive to sexual conquest, full of the same urgency and the same jealous rage against rivals. Empire was a virgin, whom rulers strove to possess in the face of competitors and enemies: 'Victorious emperors satisfy their driving passion for the virgin lady of sovereign rule only when the glare of their flaming sword has erased from life's tablet the name of their malicious enemy.'<sup>72</sup>) If rulers were the jealous conquerors of this alluring lady of empire, imperial servants were her admirers and lovers. Thus emperors must always increase their numbers of retainers and servants, for empire's splendour, just like that of a woman, increased the greater the numbers of its lovers: 'It is said that the position of an empire is that of beauty and elegance. The more lovers of a charming beloved there are, the more increased splendor there is in her appearance.'<sup>73</sup>) Not only, therefore, were men most truly men in the pursuit and service of empire. The latter also stood as a kind of idealised sexual outlet, where men's sexual energies could be transmuted into a striving for power and eminence as compelling as the drive to conquer beautiful women.

In Bāqir, then, we have something like a vision of imperial service and the manhood of taking part in it. In developing it, he situated himself clearly within a pre-existing tradition of reflection on these themes, and drew frequently on the sentiments and maxims he found already elaborated. His evident debts to a much older tradition do not devalue his writing as a source for the early seventeenth century. They point rather to the longer term commonalities in the experience of those seeking state service in early modern India, and to the strengthened relevance in the early seventeenth century of older normative literatures linking kingship, imperial service and ideal manhood.

### *Changing Codes in the Later Seventeenth Century*

I want now to turn to look at how some of these meanings of manliness in the context of imperial service may have changed over the course of the next half century. I want first to explore what seems to be a gradual change of emphasis in the codes of ideal manly identity associated with imperial service which may have emerged out of the more self-conscious cultivation of luxury

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<sup>72</sup>) Ibid., p. 49; 151.

<sup>73</sup>) Ibid., p. 69; 174.

in the Mughal court under the emperors Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahān, and the elaboration of much more formal and hierarchical social codes. Here, we seem to see the development of much more complex models for a new kind of courtly masculinity: man as sophisticated gentleman connoisseur, cosmopolitan in experience, refined in literary and poetic sensibility, elegant in person, fastidious in dress, and intent on his own bodily cultivation with a greater degree of individual self-concern. These later seventeenth century emphases modify, develop and sometimes radically change the concerns that were important for Bāqir. His affirmation of travel as a means to personal eminence becomes here a celebration of cosmopolitan experience, as providing cultivated men with a proper knowledge of people, places and commodities. His emphasis on the virtue of constant movement for the ambitious is replaced by a much more static model, stressing careful arrangement of the home and domestic space, to provide an environment conducive to the inner cultivation and outer display of manly refinement. Friendship and relations with peers were still important, but with less of Bāqir's emphasis on the values of mutual loyalty and shared striving. The focus of concern shifted instead to the maintenance of gentlemanly prestige with the right kinds of hospitality, the shared attractions of personal refinement which drew like-minded men to one another, and intense concern to establish spatial and physical boundaries with the culture of servants, menials and the bazaar. Imperial service still mattered for this changing sense of cultivated manhood, but here much more as a source of income and a setting for display: of the commodities that a man could command, of his skills as a connoisseur, and of his knowledge of the right etiquette for different situations. Nor was great eminence in imperial service invariably desirable: it might also represent rather risk, thankless trouble and distraction, and subordination itself was a degrading compromise of a dignified gentleman's independence.

Some at least of these connections should not surprise us, set against the previous century of expansion in Asian trade in luxury commodities, increasingly efficient information networks, of growing flows of migrants with specialist skills to offer and of cultural envoys and travellers in search of political and commercial information. Against this background, similar links between gentlemanly prestige, cosmopolitan knowledge, access to foreign goods and overseas markets and an ebullient ethic of consumption had gradually been forged in imperial centres throughout Western Asia, the Middle East and beyond into Europe.<sup>74</sup>) These shared cultural dimensions of political centralisation and urbanisation have also in recent years helped to challenge the notion of Euro-

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74) For these themes in the Indian context, see Hodgson 1974, vol. 3, pp. 90-92; Ali 1997, pp. 155-70, and in the European and Ottoman contexts, Jardine 1996, pp. 277-330.

pean exceptionalism, and to suggest parallel patterns in state building and the formation of elite cultures in early modern Europe and Asia.<sup>75</sup>) As Peter Burke has argued, there are striking Eurasian parallels in the emergence of elite cultures of conspicuous consumption between the late sixteenth and the early eighteenth centuries, as royal courts sought to tie their nobles more firmly to a culture of competitive display, and as the consolidation of urban centres around the court made the newly wealthy a more prominent feature of social life.<sup>76</sup>) Neither was the growing importance of commodities and cultural knowledges from Safavid and Ottoman territories and beyond necessarily in tension with the forging of patrimonial connections within different parts of the empire that underlay earlier patterns of consumption at the Mughal court. Given the frequency of contact between these imperial centres, and the careful cultivation of diplomatic links between the Mughal and Safavid courts in particular, these circulations of commodities could themselves be viewed as a magnified system of gift exchange, affirming the power of both of these royal houses by simultaneous demonstration of access to distant markets and patronage of domestic manufactures.<sup>77</sup>)

In the north Indian context, these shifts carried complex and ambiguous implications for the construction of male virtue and power. There is no escaping the sense of dominance and control here: a gentleman is defined both by his knowledge of manners, commodities and cultural repertoires, and by his ability to command, to savour and consume them as connoisseur. Humoural understandings of the body, and a strong sense of the psychic effects to be achieved through bodily disciplines, continued to be important here. These forms of connoisseurship enabled a man to create the pleasing physical environment most conducive to inner equilibrium, to surround himself with textures, fragrances, colours, tastes and sounds that would foster an ever greater emotional and spiritual refinement. The dynamic thus established between body, person and environment also implied a stronger sense of bodily individuation, expressed in sensuous engagement with a wider and more diverse world of accessible commodities. At the same time, however, the very exquisiteness of these forms of refinement, the overriding concern with personal dignity, the aversion to all that

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For a wider discussion of the significance of these flows of commodities, see Appadurai 1986, pp. 3-63.

75) These new 'connective' histories are discussed in Lieberman 1997.

76) Burke 1993, pp. 148-161. See also Wills 1993, pp. 133-47.

77) Thus, for example, correspondence between Jahāngir and Shāh 'Abbās I frequently refers to the exchange of gifts, and gratitude for the procurement of a whole range of rare articles—goblets, astrolabes, horses, rubies, clocks, medicines—from Middle Eastern and European markets. See Islam 1979, pp. 143-219.

was vulgar and low, and the reduction of intellectual accomplishment almost to a set of social conventions, lent itself very clearly to caricature and mockery, to the suggestion that these forms of masculinity could be vitiated and corrupt. Of course, the sense of tension between the luxury and polished civilities of the town and the plain brotherly solidarities of the warrior band or tribal brotherhood had long been an important part of medieval Islamic political reflection, elaborated into a complex theory of the rise and decline of dynasties by the historian courtier Ibn Khaldūn.<sup>78)</sup> However, it is possible to see the beginnings of a more specific north Indian critique developing from the mid-seventeenth century.

*Knowledge, Connoisseurship and Consumption: Defining the 'Real' mirzā*

Evidence about these codes emerges in a range of different sources, particularly in biographical accounts of individual noblemen, their sophistication as connoisseurs, their refinement in manners and their cosmopolitan experience.<sup>79)</sup> Most directly helpful, however, is the genre of *mirzā nāmāh* written in India in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, which sought to define *mirzā'ī*, 'gentility' or 'gentlemanliness.' *Mirzā'ī* derived from the Persian title of *mirzā*, used as a suffixed title for kings, princes and later by noblemen, and was widespread in India as elsewhere in the Islamic world by the fifteenth century. In India, it was applied particularly to close kinsmen of the Mughals, and to others with Timurid or Safavid ancestry. By the time of Akbar, however, the official title of *khān* was beginning to supersede it. It remained in use principally amongst men with Iranian or Turanian links in particular: Timurid princes, distant relations of the Mughal reigning family, Safavid refugee princes and many other Iranis with real or pretended claims of Safavid ancestry, or descendants of the most distinguished Turani families. The title was sometimes simply assumed by men who pretended to the right lineage; it could also be granted by the emperor, as it was when Akbar conferred it on Bahādur Singh, or Shāh Jahān bestowed it on the famous Rajput general Jai Singh.<sup>80)</sup>

In India, however, *mirzā* and the qualities of *mirzā'ī* associated with it came increasingly to have a rather different secondary sense, which brought it close to the sense of personal cultivation in *ādāb*. Like *ādāb*, the ideals of gentility

78) The *Muqaddimah* of Ibn Khaldūn is discussed in Gellner 1981, pp. 1-85.

79) The *Ma'āshir al-umarā* is the richest single account of individual negotiations of these etiquettes, but see also *Dhakhirat ul-Khawānīn*, Desai 1993, from which Shāhnavāz Khān took much of his information.

80) Ahmad 1975, pp. 108-110. As it became more strongly identified with Persian courtly refinement and literary skill, the term also shifted from its postposed Turkish to its preposed Persian use: Perry 1990, p. 221.

and cultivation in *mirzā'ī* rested on the same implicit connection between outward bodily deportment and inner moral life. It also carried the same intense emphasis on personal cultivation, on the infusion of every action with spiritual awareness in the quest for self-perfection. Yet there were also important differences. As an ethic, *mirzā'ī* was shaped by the particular social meanings which grew up around the title of *mirzā*, as the longstanding association between Persianate culture and ideals of civility broadened the title to denote the social and spiritual refinement of any 'gentleman' of high birth with aspirations to taste and culture. Thus, *mirzā'ī* implied the moral and personal cultivation of *ādāb*, but its meanings were also coloured by their association with particular kinds of social pretension, and this gave the term a narrower semantic range and a greater social specificity. In one sense, *mirzā'ī* was itself a kind of *ādāb*, the ethic of a gentleman, usually but not exclusively an imperial servant, anxious to cultivate the moral and social refinement associated with princes and great nobles. However, its content was inevitably influenced and given substance by the particular north Indian urban setting of these socially aspirant groups, by the styles of domestic and material life they considered desirable, and by the forms of sociability, religious sensibility and sexual self-expression whose mastery was seen as important for the cultured imperial servant. Shaped by this setting, *mirzā'ī* came to imply self-cultivation carried to a particularly exquisite pitch of spiritual and sensuous awareness, in which a man strove for perfection simultaneously in his physical environment, his social deportment and his inner moral self, and fastidiously avoided disturbance and contamination by the world of plebeians and the bazaar. Here too, the wider world of cosmopolitan knowledge and access to new commodities were important both in constructing the right material setting, and in providing the *mirzā* with a range of different possibilities through which he might express his own individual sense of physical and moral perfection. Not that great material luxury was essential: in many ways the connections made here between physical and moral beauty shared much in common with sufi spirituality, and many sufi mystics were known for their qualities of *mirzā'ī*. These associations with a very particular social context also imbued *mirzā'ī* and the model of the *mirzā* with important social tensions not present in the concept of *ādāb*: its very self-conscious virtuosity opened it to parody. *Mirzā'ī* was also, as we shall see, a self-consciously gendered conception, an ideal of personal cultivation specifically marked out as exclusively and inherently masculine in a way that *ādāb*, for all its typical associations with male elites, was not.<sup>81</sup>) Despite these differences, however, the more general concept

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81) For women's development of *ādāb*, see Metcalf 1984, pp. 184-95.



of *ādāb* remained extremely important in defining the meaning of *mirzā'ī*, both in providing cultural authority for its emphases on individual cultivation, and in laying out a wider semantic field in which its particular meanings could be located.

These developments in the term, and particularly the emergence of conduct manuals describing, defining and sometimes deriding the figure of the *mirza*, provide important insights into some of the particular meanings coming to be associated with elite manliness in the later seventeenth century. They point to the consolidation in Delhi and other north Indian centres of a complexly stratified urban elite, of greater and lesser amirs, lower ranking mansabdars and merchant households. These categories were not, of course, mutually exclusive: Mughal imperial servants invested their cash revenues heavily in trade, both directly in the purchase of goods, often luxury commodities, and indirectly in capital advances to merchants. As we know, these great households and those that emulated them provided, along with the imperial court, the most powerful sources of demand for luxury commodities in the empire, invested very heavily in many types of building besides their own houses, from the charitable *sarāy* for travellers to mosques, gardens, tanks, bridges and wells, formed critical sources of employment to very large classes of domestic servants, craftsmen and specialist retainers, and acted as very important sources of patronage for poets, scholars, physicians, musicians and dancers.<sup>82</sup>) Less well understood are the finer social gradations that emerged within these upper and middle strata of urban society and particularly the cultural etiquettes that came to be associated with them. Most significantly, the social definition of a *mirzā* opened it as a status and set of aspirations to any man of taste, culture and refinement, from the high-ranking amir to the lowly centurion. This, together with the elaboration itself of a model for social emulation, suggests the emergence of new classes of lesser amirs, inferior imperial servants, upper gentry and merchant classes, anxious to know how to cultivate a refined social style. The writers examined here confirm this impression, in that their principal concern is to define the boundaries of *mirzā'ī* against upstarts and social inferiors seeking to pass themselves off as *mirzā*, but who had no proper understanding of the social and spiritual cultivation that a true *mirzā* should possess.

There is no doubt that conduct books of this kind can be very difficult to interpret. We need to ask how far this particular genre was actually new. In addition, we cannot read social practice off from it in any straightforward way, and the codes it offered must always have been a subject for negotiation rather

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82) Chandra 1986, pp. 205-17; Ali 1997, pp. 154-170; Blake 1991, pp. 44-82. Contemporaries such as the Dutch factor Pelsaert also provided graphic accounts for the early seventeenth century: see Moreland and Geyl 1925, pp. 64-8.

than a rigid template for behaviour. On the question of novelty, Indo-Persian literature contains conduct manuals of many different kinds, from the *akhlāq*, sufi and 'mirrors' genres discussed above, to the commonplace books and works on household management often compiled by Mughal writers. The latter also frequently contain guides to a whole range of gentlemanly skills, such as archery, divination and letter writing, and to the appropriate uses of commodities such as perfumes, cosmetics and intoxicants.<sup>83</sup>) Nevertheless, there do seem to be themes that are distinctive and novel in the Mirzā Nāmāh texts, which connect both with what we know of the emergence of much more finely stratified gentry groups in the towns and court centres of north India, and with the growing sense of threat to the exclusivity of imperial service, which is well represented in other sources.<sup>84</sup>) What marks these texts off from earlier genres is their self-conscious sense of connection not only with this particular urban milieu, but with lesser gentry and much humbler imperial servants within it, and with the ways in which these might aspire to the manners of their social superiors, but on much more modest salaries. Their concern with commodities extended beyond instruction in their use, or assessment of their qualities, to a very precise account of their significance and nuances in social settings. In other ways too, there does seem a real social specificity in these very detailed works, which may give them some value as sources for normative masculinity. Contemporaries often described men of great culture and refinement as possessing all the talents of *mirzā'ī*, and the title was often claimed in its preposed Persian form.<sup>85</sup>) Lastly, the elements of satire in some of these texts suggest that these codes and their implications for gentlemanliness were indeed in some form part of the cultural currency of Mughal imperial servants, their resonances recognised even with the briefest or most mocking of reference.

I focus here on two of these conduct books, which contrast in interesting ways. The first, available in the British Library, is anonymous, and probably composed around 1660.<sup>86</sup>) The second has as its author one Mirzā Kāmrān, whose title played deliberately on the word *kāmrān*, meaning successful, fortunate,

83) Some of these *bayāz* are listed in Marshall 1985, p. 577.

84) See, for example, the *Tārīkh-i Dilkāshā* of Bhimsen Burhanpuri, who accompanied Aurangzeb on his Deccan campaigns: 1972, p. 232.

85) See, for example, the description of the early eighteenth century poet and sufi mystic Mirzā Jān-i Jānān in the *Muraqqa'-i Delhi* of Dargāh Quli Khān, Ansari 1982, pp. 64-5. Interestingly, while he is described as 'having all the arts of mirzā'ī,' *ādāb* was the term the author used to denote the skills of the woman singer Nūr Bai: pp. 102-3.

86) Rieu vol. 2, 1966, p. 826. Rieu dates the BM copy as 1739, but the only other copy, in the library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, is dated 1660, so it seems likely that the BL copy reflects writing of this early date. Ahmad 1975, p. 99.

voluptuously happy.<sup>87)</sup> It is difficult to date, and its author is hard to identify, but it probably belongs also to the later seventeenth century.<sup>88)</sup> Both texts set themselves the same task. The BL *Mirzā Nāmah*, its author explained, was planned as a manual to demonstrate the differences between the true *mirzā* and the debased impostors the author saw trying to pass themselves off as such.<sup>89)</sup> *Mirzā Kāmrān* explained that he had travelled through Hindustan, after having visited Kashmir and Lahore, and observed that 'a body of reckless men of this country' had begun to give themselves new social pretensions, and in particular to pretend to the dignity of *mirzā*'i. 'As this slave [the writer] had some rightful claim to this position, my sense of honour did not allow me to let this great revolution and disorder undermine the rules and regulations on which the rank of a *Mirzā* is based,' and so he wrote his own guide.<sup>90)</sup> Although the details of proper accomplishments for the *mirzā* each gave were very similar, the two authors approached their subject in markedly different ways. The BL *Mirzā Nāmah* was an earnest composition dealing with the subject with care and respect. *Mirzā Kāmrān*'s work was in large part a wonderful satire on this ideal of cultivated manliness, his words 'mixed with wit and humour,' to produce a deliberate parody, and conclusions 'each one of which may be called the guide of Plato and the helper of Avicenna.'<sup>91)</sup> He had many precedents for doing so, and his reference to Greek antecedents suggests that he was aware of them. The classical Persian traditions of ethical and political writing had long generated their own parodies, most notably in the work of the fourteenth century satirist 'Obayd-e Zakani, whose *Akhlāq al-ashraf*, 'Ethics of the nobles,' lampooned the morals of post-Mongol Iran's ruling elite.<sup>92)</sup>

Thus, the BL *Mirzā Nāmah* proposed a serious definition of the basic qualifications for *mirzā*'i: a pure family pedigree, a social position of dignity and a *manṣab* of at least a thousand, or income from elsewhere such as commerce, sufficient to maintain a proper style of life. But wealth alone did not make a *mirzā*: rather, 'purity of soul and uniqueness of attributes distinguish a *mirzā*, whose actions are wholesome, who is pure in outward appearance and virtuous in habits.' Interestingly here too, the writer suggested a move away from older Mughal values of devoted personal service. For the gentleman connoisseur, the

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87) Steingass, p. 1009.

88) Husain 1913, p. 1. From stray internal references, Husain dates it to 1608, but Ahmad suggests the late seventeenth century, which seems more plausible as its description of a *mirzā* are too elaborated for such an early date.

89) Ahmad 1975, p. 100.

90) Husain 1913, pp. 2-3.

91) Ibid., p. 3.

92) Sprachmann 1989, pp. 226-248.

demands of high rank and personal bondage to the emperor implied not elevation, but subordination and servility: 'If a *mirzā* has enough for his status, he should be grateful for it more than being a commander of seven thousand, because service and subordination is degrading for a *mirzā*. He should not be beguiled by the attraction of the greater mansabs and the multitude of horsemen and footsoldiers in the service of great nobles. The lesser the headache of high status, the better.' For the real *mirzā*, therefore, it was actually far better to hold the rank of an inferior amir than to aim for great office, for lesser prominence would leave him freer to pursue his own real refinement of body and spirit. Interestingly here, the author described in great detail the kinds of men who aspired to *mirzā'ī*, but without success. Failed aspirants to *mirzā'ī* came from a range of social backgrounds: descendants of nobles who held lesser ranks in the imperial service and lacked wealth, but whose refined temperaments made them aspire to it: these were men who deserved sympathy. Then there were foster brothers of kings, noblemen or great lords, intoxicated with what was actually a very insecure and dependent position. Then there were men who had accumulated mere wealth out of love of money, and would soon lose it and their pretensions through quarrelsomeness and cupidity. Other people again thought that being a *mirzā* meant 'pinning flowers to one's headgear and wearing a greenish or semi-greenish turban and strolling through a garden.' Real *mirzā'ī* was actually a spiritual and sensual experience of much greater depth: it was 'to inhale and imbibe the fragrance of the flower.'<sup>93</sup>) Mirzā Kāmrān, on the other hand, dealt with the 'serious' intellectual and artistic accomplishments of the properly educated and cosmopolitan *mirzā*—knowledge of God, philosophy, grammar, correct speech, the *Gulistān* and *Bostān* of Sa'dī by the age of thirty, the Arabic, Persian, Hindustani and Turkish languages, composition and accounts—in the form of a brief and deliberately slapdash list, reflecting as it were the incongruity of such profound matters having come to be the fashion accessories of men with pretensions to gentlemanliness.<sup>94</sup>) He then passed on to a much longer and fuller discussion of what he clearly felt to be the real substance of *mirzā'ī*: correct manners, proper deportment with superiors, inferiors and friends, taste, dress, sensibility and connoisseurship of fine things and places.

Both authors, then, dealt at length and in great detail with food, drink, the etiquette of bathing and dining, the appropriate ways of furnishing a house and garden in different seasons, the kinds of smells and sounds proper to like and

93) Ahmad 1975, p. 100.

94) Husain 1913, pp. 3-4.

dislike, bodily comportment, hunting and warriorship. For the BM *Mirzā Nāmāh*, what defined a *mirzā* was not only knowledge, discernment and the ability to command commodities, but also an extraordinary refinement of manners and spirit in the use of these commodities, impelling him to avoid everything that was coarse, vulgar or undignified. Literary, historical and philosophical knowledges were important, but also Qur'anic exegesis, 'for an irreligious *mirzā* is even more insignificant in the eyes of the accomplished ones than an impecunious *mirzā*.' The *mirzā* should use *shikasta* script for worldly purposes and *naskh* for copying the Qur'an and other religious writings, and should spend some hours in this occupation. He should be able to judge and train horses and falcons. On the qualities of the warrior, interestingly, the BM *Mirzā Nāmāh* had only a short paragraph, almost as a gesture to the convention that a Mughal nobleman was a soldier as well as a gentleman. His preferred sport should be *chawgān*, the favourite sport of the Mughal cavalry. 'A soldierly *mirzā* is better than an unsoldierly one. He should not be inclined to enjoy merely watching marksmanship. On the day of battle he should not choose the ignominy of running away; at the time of action he should remain firm like a soldier, even though he be killed.' At the same time, he should choose his weapons carefully so as not to offend his sensibilities: 'He should learn to recognise the qualities of swords, and acquire the science of archery. He should not be all that inclined to use a matchlock musket, so that the unpleasant smell of its fuse may not reach his nose.'<sup>95</sup>) Practical artistic knowledges were important too: in music, the *mirzā* should know which instruments and styles of music to like, and which to avoid for their association with 'people who are shallow and ignorant and lack dignity.' Knowledge of music was a great art, but the *mirzā* himself should not bring ridicule on himself by personally taking part. He should not disgust his assembled friends with his own unskilful singing, besides which 'Singing can lead to dancing and that necessarily to other disgraceful and ignominious actions.'<sup>96</sup>)

It was in the home and the hospitality of the *mirzā*, however, that this combination of knowledge, display and bodily discipline came together, to create an environment perfectly conducive to refinement. The details carefully set out here convey a very vivid picture of the social ambitions of these lesser amiri and upper gentry households, the commodities valued in them, the servants and clients they supported, and their role in cementing vertical as well as horizontal social ties amongst the elites of the imperial capital. Thus, drinking for a *mirzā* was most suitable in the privacy of his home; if he had to drink out, he

95) Ahmad 1975, p. 101. *Chawgān* was the form of polo developed in the Mughal cavalry.

96) Idem.

should keep his own bottle separate rather than join in the general circulation of the common bottle. He should pay careful regard to temperature, drinking wine only when the weather was cool or damp. Colour, taste and fragrance were all critical to the pleasure of his discerning guests, who should be able to enjoy a gold embroidered table cloth, the shape and shine of glass and gold vessels, and the translucence of the wine. Tastes were carefully graded: quince or pomegranate provided the best relish with wine, with pistachios an acceptable alternative. The *mirzā* 'should always provide perfumes in his parties: and try to keep his party fragrant with them. All sorts of vases full of flowers in every season should be on view. He should keep his feast colourful; so that whoever departs from it may feel that he has been to the feast of a *mirzā*; that is to say, he should depart bearing the fragrant smell of scent and flower.'<sup>97</sup>)

Similar etiquettes governed the art of dining. Here, knowledge about the varying qualities of imported and more local articles of consumption counted as much as manners at table. He should have appropriate sour condiments with his meals according to season. To drink with his meals he should like juices of pomegranate, mango, lemon and orange, especially that from Kashmir. Delicate pilaffs were very appropriate: the writer described his having dined with a great amir, who had particularly recommended pilaff 'because it did not grease the hand and he did not have to try hard to cleanse his hand with a towel, which was disgusting.' Some vegetables were much more fitting than others: cooked turnip, even in winter, was too coarse for a *mirzā*, as were thick broths of goat meat or barley. Delicately flavoured broths and vegetables such as beetroot offered a preferable alternative, for 'beetroot is a food fit for a *mirzā*, being agreeable, colourful and sweet.'<sup>98</sup>) He should know which were the best fruits, pickles and accompaniments for different dishes, such as 'the fruit of Kuch-Bihar and the Sumatra of Akbarabad,' which were delicacies made especially for the *mirzā*. He ought to enjoy sugarcane from Bihar and Akbarabad, 'on condition that he does not pile up the chewed refuse in front of himself.' Other foods, such as the radish, should be avoided at all costs, for 'the belch which follows the eating of radishes is worse and more unpleasant to the mind than the sound of a gunshot and the smell of gunpowder.' Similar sorts of offence to his sensibility could be caused by an ignorant or gluttonous companion, who did not clean his teeth or face and hands after a meal, or who talked with his mouth full of betel, thereby spraying the dress of fellow diners: 'the company of such a person is distasteful and disgusting' and should be avoided.<sup>99</sup>) And

97) Ibid., pp. 102-3.

98) Ibid., p. 103.

99) Ibid., pp. 103-4.

even as he enjoyed these pleasures, the *mirzā* should not forget restraint. He should stop eating while he is still hungry, and if necessary fill up later, but at home rather than outside, 'for eating outside is like eating at a shop in the bazaar.'<sup>100</sup>)

The *mirzā* should also attend to the physical environment of his house, in its appearance, perfume, temperature and texture. It should be carefully secluded from the bazaar, for 'a house without curtains and screens is like an open shop in a bazaar.' A fire of aloe wood should be kept alight in winter, and good quality carpets used: those from Kirman if he could afford them, and those from Kashmiri *pattu* if he could not. In summer, he should have a cooling *khaskhānah*, fans, a cotton floor covering and rose perfume. His garden offered further possibilities for pleasure, refinement and spiritual cultivation. A *mirzā* 'was bound to be attracted by a garden.' It ought to be filled with the right sounds, sights and fragrances. 'In every corner of his garden there should be colourful chirping and singing birds like nightingales and parrots. He should hear unpleasant voices of other birds from a distance, because a *mirzā*'s temperament cannot bear listening to such noises.' The writer concluded by associating these intensely emotional effects with one of the Persian literary tradition's most familiar images of beauty and spiritual love. 'The beauty of these flowers and birds is not merely for external view: the beauty of every bird leads one to the contemplation of its Maker, and its singing leads the heart to the anguish (of divine love).'<sup>101</sup>)

Particular etiquettes also governed riding and hunting. For the author of the BM *Mirzā Nāmāh*, the palanquin was 'most harmless of all the rides available to a *mirzā*,' for one risked falling off a horse or elephant, 'but in the rainy season, an elephant ride is the best; as both in the *palki* and on the horse there is the risk of getting soaked in the rain, or of the mud and dirty water from the rooftops soiling the head and headgear and trousers.' Out hunting, a *mirzā* should ride a black and white horse with a long mane, and prefer the sparrow hawk above other hunting birds. He should make sure that his animals were accounted so as to be distinct from those of the vulgar. He should not gallop his horse too hard, for 'One may well be enamoured of hunting and absorbed in it; but life is more precious than the spectacle of hunting, which is not worth falling from one's horse, or the falling off of one's headgear or the breaking of one's neck.'<sup>102</sup>)

In the high parody of *Mirzā Kāmran*, on the other hand, all this delicacy and

100) Ibid., p. 104.

101) Idem.

102) Ibid., p. 105.

self-consciousness connoisseurship were there to be lampooned. If a *mirzā* happened to sit at table with a man of prestige like a lawyer, he should eat nothing at all, 'and in case he dies of hunger, he shall have a great reward in the next life.' He reeled off what ought to be the proper preferences of the cultivated *mirzā*: 'Ruby should be regarded by him as the best among all jewels, and the palanquin as the best of all conveyances. He should keep a watermelon as the best of all fruits.' A *mirzā* 'should regard Lahore as the best of all the towns in India. He should recognise the fort of Agra as unequalled in the whole world. If there be no controversy or dispute on that point, then he must think Isfahan as the best town in Persia.'<sup>103</sup>) Conventions about personal consumption and display came in for similar satire, with the uncomfortable realities of life as a low-level imperial servant in India set against the inflated ideal of *mirzā'ī*. Much more sceptical than the author of the BM *Mirzā Nāmāh* in his approach, *Mirzā Kāmrān* was in no doubt here that actually those for whom these refinements were important were not all amirs of a thousand rank or over, but also much more middling gentry, concerned to negotiate their relationships with social superiors in approved ways, and to avoid the risks of incautious mixing with others. 'With the rank of a centurion, the *Mirzā* must not cause the cover of his hubble-bubble to be made of silver and put silver on the reins of his horse, because they would not remain with him.'<sup>104</sup>) For lesser imperial servants, hospitality could be fraught with peril: 'If he be in service, then as long as he does not get the rank of five hundred, he must not take guests to his house; and in times of trouble, let him avoid being a guest of low people, for this will end in insult.' Conversation needed careful handling too: 'In company he should not take part in controversies, especially religious ones. Let him keep his religious views quite secret, lest they cause him some bodily injury.' Even finding a house in India carried pitfalls for the unwary; the *mirzā* 'must not be in search of mere architectural beauty, but must pay due consideration to its stability, lest he may not suffer an untimely death in the rainy season.'<sup>105</sup>) As for military qualities, the fastidiousness of the *mirzā* became a straight target for mockery. 'The *mirzā* must value life and should not go near war. If he happens to be on a battlefield, he must not pursue the defeated and flying army; on the contrary if his party suffer a defeat, he must run away as fast as he can.'<sup>106</sup>)

There were also very careful prescriptions for dress, and here, very interestingly, one sees a more overt consciousness in the BM *Mirzā Nāmāh* that this

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103) Husain 1913, p. 5.

104) *Ibid.*, p. 7.

105) *Ibid.*, p. 6.

106) *Ibid.*, p. 5.



minute attention to style and self-conscious cultivation of taste could appear to blur proper distinctions between men and women. In this moment of internal critique, the BM *Mirzā Nāmāh* seems very much to have a particular target in mind: that of young men who deliberately cultivated homoerotic styles by carrying the fastidious refinement of *mirzā'ī* to feminising extremes. This clear sensitivity to the homoerotic possibilities in the cultivation of certain kinds of masculine refinement raises the question of homosexual practices in the definition of *mirzā'ī*, and by implication the complex issue of homosexual identity in Mughal court society more widely. I cannot address the latter in any detail here, but three broad points are worth making. As argued elsewhere, norms for the sexual comportment of high imperial servants that were disseminated under Akbar had sought to distance the former from homoerotic attachments, and to promote an idealised image of imperial servants as patriarchal and heterosexual householders, a model for authoritative masculinity that seemed more in keeping with local Hindustani norms than 'Mughal' traditions of public homosexual attachment.<sup>107</sup>) Yet the latter proved extremely difficult to suppress, and many imperial servants proved resistant to suggestions that they abandon their sexual attachments with favourite young men. In fact, much contemporary evidence points to an inclusive approach to sexual enjoyment, such that beautiful boys were seen as one amongst a range of sources for sexual pleasure, rather than denoting a particular and exclusive 'homosexual' identity.<sup>108</sup>) Yet this does not mean that sexual identities remained undifferentiated, or that the same social tolerance extended to all varieties of sexual expression. In literary sources as well as the new norms for imperial servants, overt pederasty continued to attract considerable social disapproval, which was directed most intensely at the passive partner, the catamite.<sup>109</sup>) While the evidence here is often difficult to read, there do seem to have been young as well as older men in Delhi and other north Indian courts who cultivated more distinctively homoerotic styles. Sometimes these were young singers, dancers and mime artists valued for their skills at *mahfil* entertainments and reputed for their beauty and sexual availability; sometimes wealthy amiri patrons themselves with reputa-

107) O'Hanlon, forthcoming. See also Naim 1979, pp. 120-142.

108) This emerges both in normative literature and in reported experience. Thus the *Qābūs Nāmāh* recommended enjoyment with youths as well as women, the former best in summer and the latter in winter: Levy 1951, pp. 77-8. Many sources speak of individual experience. See, for example, Abū'l Faẓl's *Akbar Nāmāh*, vol. 2, pp. 127-8, or for an eighteenth century example, Dargāh Qulī Khān's *Muraqqa'-i Delhi*, Ansari 1982, pp. 50-1.

109) For Sa'dī, for example, see Murray and Roscoe 1997, 137-9, and Southgate 1984, pp. 413-52. These were persistent themes in Mughal court culture: the Emperor Babur reflected them in his description of one of the warriors, 'Baqi the Catamite,' that his band encountered in Fergana, 'who, although he was called a catamite, was powerful and manly with the sword.' Thackston 1996, p. 287.

tions for their sexual connoissership as well as the range of their cultural accomplishments and the sensual pleasures of their hospitality.<sup>110)</sup>

The author of the BM *Mirzā Nāmāh* negotiated his way very carefully around these sexual complexities, taking care to affirm the principle of *mirzā'i* as a form of cultivated masculine power. Thus the *mirzā* 'should avoid the company of such [self-proclaimed], self-opinionated, bastard *mirzas* who tie their turbans with great delicateness, who talk with the movement of head or with the gestures of body or of eyebrows, who are over-emphatic in speech.' Such people 'who turn away with affected delicacy from whatever is invigorating, who do not clean their teeth without looking in the mirror, who clad themselves in the single layer of a thin and transparent upper garment and wear trousers of satin and *kamkhab* (many-coloured, embroidered cloth), and who have the habit of eating pan frequently and blackening their teech with *missi*. Such *mirzas* are no good. *Mirza*-hood is to be *mirza* khan or *mirza*-beg; not to be a *mirzada*-begum or *mirzada*-khanum.'<sup>111)</sup>

These emphases on the manliness of personal restraint were reflected in other prescriptions for dress. Interestingly, the writer recommended plainer and more natural materials, in place of the glossy fabrics or elaborate ornaments usually associated with luxury and prestige: a kind of conspicuous abstinence in which the sophistication of an understated style and the need for economy met in happy coincidence. The *mirzā* 'should use pearls for buttons, for pearl is natural while other jewels have to be cut. In winter, he should wear a shawl, either plain or imprinted with gold and silver leaves.' His garments should be threaded with silver, rather than of embroidered brocade, cloth of gold or satin. The same considerations applied to flowers in the turban: 'He should not wear flowers in his turban, as it is effeminate to do so. It is a blemish for the *mirza*, who is a [masculine] lover.' But he could occasionally, and in privacy, put a bunch of feathery *nafarman* flowers in his turban, which looked becoming. Restrained dress of this kind also had the advantage of being less costly: there were workshops which produced high quality striped cloth for turbans at very low prices. The *mirzā* should certainly avoid trousers of satin or cloth of gold, which were not dignified: these were better fitted for pillowcases or curtains or for giving away as a ceremonial dress.<sup>112)</sup> The dagger or *jamdār*, an essential item of court dress worn tucked into the sash, was likewise obligatory for the *mirzā*, as

110) Dargāh Qulī Khān is an excellent source here: see, for example, Ansari 1982, pp. 92-3 for Taqī, the gregarious eunuch and master conjuror who attracted numerous pederasts and beautiful catamites to his *mahfil*, and pp. 56-7 for the amir Ṣādiq Qulī Khān, famous for his patronage of musicians and his connoisseurship of beautiful faces.

111) Ahmad 1975, p. 105.

112) Ibid., pp. 105-6. Pious Muslims were often warned against the sensual temptations of silk: see Bayly 1986, pp. 290-2.

were rings of ruby, emerald, turquoise and cornelian, for their different benevolent effects on the body.<sup>113)</sup>

This kind of manliness also manifested itself in restraint and dignity in the conduct of the household and sexual life. The *mirzā* 'should totally abstain from giving a chance to his male friends and companions to listen to the singing of his private concubines; otherwise, it will amount to pandering, and may lead to a great deal of mischief.' The dangerous attractions of beardless boys were particularly emphasised. To avoid temptation to his guests at his drinking parties, 'he should regard a bearded cupbearer better than an unbearded, handsome cupbearer,' while 'the attendant at dinner should be a young man of wholesome appearance, who offers his prayers regularly. One must not employ a handsome or good looking boy as a dinner attendant, as this leads to well-known errors and is imprudent. For it may induce the guests to eat the bread but to break the salt-bottle.' And there should be a clear end to his parties: 'After smoking the tobacco from a pipe, and after the perfumes have been served in the party and he has listened to some music, he should rise, making the excuse that it is time to go to bed; and then he should say farewell to his departing guests.'<sup>114)</sup>

Friends and good company were indispensable for the *mirzā* too, but they needed to be carefully chosen. 'He should not dance attendance at the houses of great men, since this is undignified.'<sup>115)</sup> Rather, he should choose people like himself, both to enjoy the pleasures of his hospitality and to share in his refinement of sensibility. 'All his qualities are as elegant as his appearance; on his stature his dress looks becoming; his disposition draws others to him; in generosity he is ahead of others so that his expenses sometimes exceed his income.'<sup>116)</sup> With his costs sometimes running ahead of his purse, the *mirzā* needed to avoid familiarity with people in need who were simply looking for money, whatever their rank. But those genuinely in distress he should help, not only 'in gratitude of the means which he has,' but because the power to spend and give on a superior scale marked the real *mirzā*: 'he should not be one of those *mirzas* who "spend little and sit high". He should not accept anything from anyone, in return of which he does not intend to give something else of greater value.'<sup>117)</sup>

Set against this intimacy with friends and peers, the BM *Mirzā Nāmah* suggested extremely elaborate boundaries against the world of servants, menials

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113) Ahmad 1975, p. 106.

114) Ibid., p. 102.

115) Ibid., p. 101.

116) Ibid., p. 100.

117) Ibid., p. 106.

and the bazaar. 'He should not trust the cleanliness of his cooks; but should take every possible care in the investigation that they are clean.'<sup>118</sup>) Even his gardener might be a source of contamination: 'If he wants a flower to yield fragrance, he should himself pluck it from the bough. He should not accept it from the hands of the gardener, for there is no hand cleaner than the hand of a *mirzā*.'<sup>119</sup>) In the bath, 'he should not allow a bearded bath attendant to rub his body with the brush: for the sweat which falls from his hair and beard is as unpleasant as water with brimstone.'<sup>120</sup>) The mere physical proximity of a mean or vulgar person offended him: 'he should not look at such a person if he stands in front of him; and he should regard his presence as disturbing to the mind.' Even his servants should remove themselves from his sight as soon as possible, and he should not have actually to speak to them, 'but communicate through gesture.'<sup>121</sup>)

Here, then, we have a very interesting and internally complex set of discourses about ideal manliness in the imperial service. In these later seventeenth century developments, there was still a strong sense of connection between forms of ideal cultivated manhood and the imperial service, an unstated assumption that imperial servants were those most likely to possess these forms of knowledge and sensibility, and to be able to command prized commodities. Yet there were also important, if sometimes implicit, shifts in style and social reference. What *mirzā'ī* offered was a model for social and spiritual refinement accessible not only to great nobles but also to lesser amirs and inferior imperial servants, particularly in the dilute and routinised forms expressed in the *mirzā nāmāh* literature. What also put this kind of *mirzā'ī* within reach of the humbler imperial servant was that its personal cultivation was declared, to some extent at least, to be independent of income: gentlemanly refinement was a state of mind, which with the right sensibility could be cultivated on a very moderate income. If this was a more socially accessible model, it was also one with a much stronger emphasis on the bodily and moral self-cultivation of the individual, through careful deployment of the right kinds of domestic environment, commodities, knowledges and social connections. Here, indeed, the elements of tension and ambiguity described above meant a wide range of possibilities for individual interpretation and self-expression. At this level, *mirzā'ī* offered not so much a unitary or rigid model, so much as a set of related themes, which individuals might negotiate in very different ways. As suggested above, individual engagement with

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118) Ibid., p. 103.

119) Ibid., p. 106.

120) Idem.

121) Idem.

its values was not a question of adherence to a single rigid set of prescriptions, but much more a personal negotiation of a set of related themes. In an important sense the *mirzā* was a *bricoleur*, assembling his own particular forms of self-cultivation in the commodities he knew about and consumed, in his bodily disciplines, norms for dress and comportment, his literary and artistic leanings and sexual preferences, and his handling of the potential tensions between martial bearing and personal refinement. From the point of view of the writers examined above, of course, this was precisely the problem: all sorts of inferior people were calling themselves *mirzā* when they had no business to, and they were interpreting its codes of behaviour in sometimes unorthodox and transgressive ways. For the BM *Mirzā Nāmah*, the point was to make a serious distinction between the real *mirzā* on the one hand, and mere vulgar upstarts, and the 'bastard' *mirzā'ī* of men effeminate in dress and love, on the other. For *Mirzā Kāmran*, the whole routinisation of *mirzā'ī*, and the affections of parvenus who identified with its values, offered an open invitation to parody and ridicule.

### Conclusions

Why did these novel codes for elite masculinity emerge in this way from the later seventeenth century? This is a complex question, to which only very tentative answers can be suggested here. These codes emerged in the context of a court culture in which consumption and display were important indicators of authority. Here, new classes of moderately wealthy imperial servants and gentry were seeking ways of assimilating their own social styles to those of court elites, even as their sense of personal connection with imperial authority weakened, and a degree of dignified moral and personal independence seemed more appropriate for a man of culture. Its fusion of moral and spiritual refinement with the pleasures of gentlemanly living also made *mirzā'ī* a particularly appropriate ethic in the more conformist religious culture of the seventeenth century court: a *mirzā* could integrate the qualities of a pious sufi mystic perfectly within his daily life as a cultured gentleman. Perhaps most importantly, these new codes developed within a cultural world already accustomed to making an art of mundane living and infusing it with moral significance, and in which the links between elite manliness and imperial service were already well-forged.

These developing discourses were to have important implications for the wider cultural authority of Mughal imperial service, at a time when Aurangzeb's prolonged campaigns in the Deccan placed existing loyalties as well as salaries under strain. At one level, their effect was undoubtedly further to strengthen the position of the court as a cultural arbiter, and the image of the ideal imperial servant as embodiment of cultivated manliness. The etiquettes of *mirzā'ī*

helped to disseminate new and more accessible styles of personal refinement and conspicuous domestic display, whose cultural referent was still the imperial court, and whose reliance on a wide range of commodities as the means to personal cultivation strengthened dependence on imperial salaries. In two particular ways, however, these shifts may have posed serious problems. As described above, *mirzā'i* represented a move away, at least implicitly, from the older ethic of the *khānazād*. It emphasised instead the dignified independence of a cultivated gentleman, whose inner equilibrium was likely to be disturbed by the anxieties of high office. Moreover, cultivation of the self took priority over cultivation of imperial superiors for the *mirzā*, for whom it was undignified to dance attendance at the houses of great men. His command over the right commodities enabled a *mirzā* to display his personal accomplishments to his peers, to give individual expression to his bodily virtuosity, and at the same time to pursue his own inner quest for spiritual refinement. In these new contexts of an expanded and more accessible world of commodities, older theories about the body still held good: a man's spiritual and emotional states were most powerfully affected by techniques of the body, and by careful control of his physical environment. But this was now a much more individuated body, marked out as such by carefully chosen forms of knowledge and consumption, and deployed more self-consciously as an instrument to perfect the soul. For all their cultural ties to the imperial court, and their material dependence on imperial salaries, these more individual forms of bodily and personal self-cultivation were in undeniable tension with older ideals of absolute personal devotion and subordination to the emperor.<sup>122)</sup> At the same time, the internal ambiguities in these ideals of personal cultivation may have weakened their potential as models for authoritative masculinity. In the hands of some men they seemed dangerously close to a kind of feminisation; carried to extremes by others, they became fit material for parody. Here, earlier Mughal strategies to make the qualities of ideal manhood the monopoly of imperial servants were at risk of being turned upside down, mocked for their anxious self-concern, even stigmatised as debased and deviant. Nor was this sense of tension only an internal one. As I have argued elsewhere, other critiques were emerging in the very different forms of normative military masculinity associated with Maratha, Sikh and Afghan warbands, as these brotherhoods of warriors contrasted their own martial and egalitarian styles with the luxury and hierarchy of the Mughal court.<sup>123)</sup>

122) For important contemporary parallels in South Indian court culture, also developing around an emerging sense of the gendered body as instrument for new forms of subjectivity, see Narayana Rao et al. 1992, pp. 113-168.

123) O'Hanlon 1997, pp. 8-12.

There may, therefore, have been a further and gendered dimension to the disintegration of Mughal service morale from the later seventeenth century that Richards among others has described.<sup>124</sup>) Certainly, the older ethic of service, obligation and reward did appear to lose much of its meaning in the context of Aurangzeb's prolonged absences in the Deccan. But just as importantly, the older model of the imperial servant as embodiment of ideal manliness seemed to have fractured. Some of its fragments were incorporated into the new and powerful conception of man as sophisticated gentleman connoisseur, but it fitted less easily with an ethic of absolute personal subordination to the emperor. Rather, the inner dynamic which connected body, moral self and environment in this conception implied a strengthened concern with the individual, and with self-cultivation as both ambition and reward. These themes were to be strengthened rather than weakened over the first half of the eighteenth century, as the drastic collapse of the emperor's personal authority coincided with the remarkable flowering of a wider and more overtly celebratory urban culture of pleasure at the imperial capital.<sup>125</sup>)

These seventeenth century developments in India may also suggest questions for the study of other early modern societies in Asia, particularly in the context of the new 'connective' histories referred to above. Lieberman and others have proposed important parallels between the ways in which many European and Asian states sought to create new kinds of cultural allegiance and shared loyalty amongst their military and urban elites. These efforts at political consolidation emerged around a range of cultural markers: language, religious ritual, dress and bodily comportment, styles of consumption and modes of learning. Their study certainly does much to blur hard distinctions between premodern political loyalties and those of the era of 'modern' nationalism, of the kind favoured a decade ago by Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson.<sup>126</sup>) This willingness to question old paradigms and to forge new connections make it the more remarkable that these new histories have yet really to pose the question of gender and the state in a focussed way, or to explore the potential for discourses about ideal manhood both to create new solidarities, and to help fix the cultural boundaries between urban and military elites and their social inferiors. If the Indian examples above have any value, they surely suggest that these questions are worth posing in other early modern Asian contexts.

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124) Richards 1984, pp. 286-8.

125) This culture is most vividly described in the descriptions of the Hyderabad official Dargāh Qulī Khān, who stayed in Delhi during the period of Nadir Shah's invasion: *Muraqqa'-i Delhi*, Ansari 1982.

126) Lieberman 1997, p. 492.

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The "sannyasi" and the Indian Wrestler: The Anatomy of a Relationship

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# the *sannyasi* and the Indian wrestler: the anatomy of a relationship

JOSEPH S. ALTER—Goshen College

In this article I propose to examine the relationship between two categories of person in northern India: the world-renouncing *sannyasi* and the Indian wrestler. I will show how the Hindu wrestler models himself on a particular conception of ascetic self-discipline and how the somatic basis of this discipline gives the wrestler a unique sense of self.<sup>1</sup> In India, wrestling is far more than a sport. Competition is but the formal and somewhat superficial aspect of what is in fact an elaborate way of life. The "intellectual" side of wrestling is what concerns many wrestlers. They dwell on the complexity of such issues as moral propriety, national reform, and personal self-control (Atreya 1971, 1972, 1986; Muzumdar 1950; Patodi 1973, 1982; K. P. Singh 1972). One must emphasize this fact when trying to convey a notion of who a wrestler is and what wrestling means, for the unfortunate image which comes most readily to mind is that of a single-minded and rather dull-witted sportsman. A more appropriate image of the Indian wrestler, one which I will try to convey, is that of a self-conscious paragon of physico-moral health.

## the model of *sannyas*

The *sannyasi* ascetic has been the focus of considerable interest among scholars of South Asia, originally because of the subject's orientalist appeal (Farquhar 1918; Oman 1905) but more recently on account of Dumont's study of *sannyas* as the linchpin in a structural logic of Hinduism (1960, 1970) and O'Flaherty's interpretation of asceticism in Hindu mythology (1973). Oman (1905) and Farquhar (1918) gave early general overviews, to which Ghurye (1964) added a more comprehensive summary (cf. Das Gupta 1969). Thapar (1982, 1984) has supplied a much needed historical perspective, which has been echoed by Lorenzen (1978), Olivelle (1986), Burghart (1983), and van der Veer (1987) (cf. Cohn 1964; Ghosh 1930). More recently there have been a number of theological and anthropological studies of specific ascetics in various parts of South Asia (Briggs 1973; Carrithers 1979; Obeyesekere 1981; Parry 1982a, 1982b; Sinha and Sarasvati 1978; van der Veer 1988). Narayan (1988) has provided an even more specific, narrative account of one particular *sadhu's* perspective on life.<sup>2</sup>

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*Indian wrestling (pahalwani) is a disciplined way of life that demands rigorous physical and moral training. In this regard it is analogous to the Hindu life path of world renunciation (sannyas). Here I show how Indian wrestlers use the model of sannyas to help define their way of life. Wrestlers recognize the centrality of the physico-moral body as a defining idiom of identity. Their interpretation of body discipline thus sheds light on general theoretical issues relating to identity formation and concepts of the person in Hindu South Asia. [India, wrestling, sannyas, asceticism, identity, body discipline]*

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Given the nature of these recent works, it is no longer completely tenable to speak of *sannyas* as an ahistorical, empirical category of being. Strictly speaking, only contextualized interpretations of *sannyas* have analytic validity. *Sannyasis* and the monastic orders to which they belong take shape and change in particular sociohistorical contexts. Even so, all particular *sannyasis* are modeled—by themselves and by those who view them—on a general conceptual theme. In this regard the noninitiated layperson or the theologian is able to speak—stereotypically and abstractly—of pan-South Asian asceticism as such.

In the Hindu worldview, *sannyas* is the fourth stage in the fourfold life cycle scheme, *ashramadharma*: *brahmacharya* (apprenticeship), *garhasthya* (householdership), *vanaprastha* (withdrawal), and *sannyas* (renunciation) (Kakar 1981:43).<sup>3</sup> A *sannyasi* is one who has renounced all material possessions and is no longer encumbered by social and ritual obligations. As a free individual he pursues divine knowledge on his own terms. To engage in this pursuit, a *sannyasi* must develop a categorically asocial attitude and style of life: he must go through life naked, alone, wandering, celibate, begging, fasting, and silent.

A slightly refined layperson's notion of *sannyas* guides the wrestler in drawing a comparison between his and the *sannyasi*'s lifestyle. Wrestlers see *sannyas* as a generic category and are not concerned with intersectarian differentiation or with historically mandated monastic protocol. For the wrestler, *sannyas* is an iconic category of person against which he can measure his own sense of self. He draws on the polysemic cultural construct of the fourfold *ashrama* scheme, but molds the concept of *sannyas* to fit his own ideological image of what constitutes that category. Because wrestlers coopt the terms of *sannyas*, their view of *sannyas* is rather idiosyncratic. Wrestlers are prone to see the *sannyas*/*garhasthya* opposition in terms of a sharp dichotomy between values of asocial abnegation on the one hand and materialist concerns with wealth, success, and social propriety on the other. As Burghart (1983) and van der Veer (1989) have pointed out, this seemingly rigid opposition may in fact be fluid and flexible—householders can be “renouncers,” and “renouncers,” in turn, can be wealthy merchants whose religious experience is devotional. (Devotional religiosity is here opposed to more doctrinaire modes of ritualized, brahmanic worship.) However, wrestlers see things in quite Dumontian terms: in their view, the relation between the asocial ascetic and the man-in-the-world is one of complementary opposition, and the structural principles of identity are irreconcilably black and white (Dumont 1960). As a consequence, wrestlers find and force opposition where many others have rationalized some form of synthesis.

In this regard it is instructive to consider Khare's (1984) work on a burgeoning Chamar ideology in the city of Lucknow. Khare shows how low-caste Chamars have manipulated the terms of *sannyas* in order to establish an anticaste identity for themselves (1984:30). What makes the Chamar case most intriguing is that it involves a nonbrahmanic interpretation of *sannyas*, an interpretation centered on the issue of socially contextualized ascetic values. The Chamars undermine hierarchy by disconnecting caste holism from other-worldly asceticism; theirs is an ideology of this-worldly asceticism in which the *sannyasi*'s anticaste activity takes on a tone of moral reform. The Chamar ascetic gives a “protohumanist” interpretation to the *sannyasi*'s individuality by inscribing notions of freedom and equality onto the extant concept of yogic self-realization. In a somewhat Gandhian fashion, the Chamar *sannyasi*'s peripatetic life of self-discipline takes on a clearly political tone of advocacy.

While the Chamars of whom Khare writes have criticized the caste ideology and thus marked out for themselves a reformed self-image, one is left with the nagging sense that as their ideology coalesces into a sectarian form it falls victim to the terms of the larger Hindu worldview. In part this is a question of recognizing legitimacy and primacy—which is to say, power—for who, after all, is accepting the terms of this ideology? Certainly not those who subscribe to the brahmanic view of things, and probably not other ascetics, who would find too much “worldly baggage” in this low-caste reform theology. In other words, however ingenious and intrinsi-

cally meaningful the Chamar interpretation of *sannyas* may be, it is still an interpretation subsumed by the structural logic of a more inclusive, hierarchical, caste-based ideology.

Like the Chamars of Lucknow, wrestlers are concerned with reinterpreting what it means to be ascetic-like. However, the wrestler's interpretation is guided not simply by anticaste values but by ideals of moral self-definition. The wrestler's interpretation is thus radical, for it seeks to integrate ascetic values into the practice of everyday life by drawing a direct line between ascetic values, wrestling discipline, and the moral duty of the common citizen. Like the Chamar ideology, the wrestler's ideology is "weak," or of limited persuasive power, when viewed from a nonpartisan perspective in which skepticism, doubt, or antipathy is the primary attitude toward the wrestler's predilections. But the wrestling ideology—however utopian and idealistic—is strong at precisely that point at which the Chamar ideology is weak, for it affords a nonsectarian vision of the social order based on a meticulous reform of the individual body. Unlike the Chamar, who actually becomes a *sannyasi*—albeit a reformed and nonbrahmanic one—the wrestler psychosomatically reconstitutes himself and his worldview by manipulating *sannyas* categories in order to become a different kind of person altogether.

## wrestling

The spatial, social, and substantive locus of a wrestler's life is his *akhara* (gymnasium). Contemporary *akharas* are located in both villages and urban neighborhoods. There is no accurate information on how common or prevalent *akharas* are: one wrestler spoke of three in his home village in the district of Etawa, Uttar Pradesh, and many of the urban wrestlers in their forties or fifties mentioned a village *akhara* in which they had first started wrestling. Perhaps more precisely indicative of wrestling's popularity is the fact that many men in India with whom I have spoken—rickshaw drivers, college professors, businessmen—have at least seen an *akhara*, and most are able to name someone of their acquaintance who has wrestled. In Banaras there are as many as 200 *akharas*, of which perhaps half are active. Kumar (1985, 1988) argues that *akhara* participation has declined because of changing values concerning the form, place, and nature of leisure activities. While this may be true—and certainly wrestlers lament the passing of a golden age when there ostensibly were more *akharas* and more wrestlers—wrestling remains a vital tradition in Banaras and much of northern India.<sup>4</sup>

An *akhara* is typically located in a cool area in the shade of *pipal*, banyan, and *nim* trees. The *akhara* compound is supposed to be clean and well demarcated. At its center is an earth pit of roughly square or rectangular dimensions, ten to 15 meters on each side, often covered by a cement, thatch, or tin pavilion. Surrounding the pit is an area of flat, packed earth where the wrestlers exercise. Every *akhara* has a source of water, usually a well. The earth of the pit is brought into the compound from a riverbank, the bottom of a dried-out pond, or a field where the soil is found to be particularly soft. Once in the pit, it is mixed with oil, turmeric, and sometimes rosewater, buttermilk, and other substances to give it a smooth texture, healing properties, and a pleasant fragrance. Wrestlers emphasize the aesthetic qualities of the *akhara* compound, seeing it as a kind of geomantic place where shade, wind, water, and earth mix to create an environment charged with invigorating energy.

Without exception Hindu *akharas* are dedicated to Hanuman, the wrestler's patron deity. In addition to Hanuman's shrine, they usually have smaller shrines dedicated to Shiva, other gods and goddesses, and local saints. Thus, an *akhara* is regarded as a sacred precinct and wrestlers are careful to maintain the compound with an eye toward purity. As Kumar has noted, in some instances it is difficult to tell whether the central aspect of an *akhara* is the temple or the wrestling pit, for the two blur into each other to such an extent as to preclude any sharp distinction. However, as the wrestler sees it, his activities are distinct from the ritual and devotional life of the larger religious complex.

Since *akhara*s are usually open to the public, many male nonwrestlers take advantage of them simply for relaxation in the tradition of what Kumar has described as *bahri alang* (going to the outside).<sup>5</sup> In this regard the *akhara* is like a combination of health spa, public park, and club—it is a socially defined place of healthful recreation. For the wrestler, however, the *akhara* is not so much a place for pleasant relaxation and reverie as it is a clean environment where he can abandon himself to the discipline of a particular regimen. The distinction between recreational pleasure and structured self-discipline is an important point, to which I will return.

Practically speaking, a wrestler is someone who knows a range of the moves and countermoves that constitute the specialized martial art of classical *malla yuddha*—wrestling.<sup>6</sup> To be a wrestler one must practice hard, eat properly, exercise regularly, and control one's passions. These are minimal criteria.

Most wrestlers are in their late teens and early twenties. Senior wrestlers remain active, however, and are staunch advocates of discipline and practice. Although physical training is a central aspect of the wrestler's routine, in fact the wrestler's whole life is a form of self-preparation. In the wrestling scheme of things, everything from defecation and bathing to comportment and devotion is integrated into the precise discipline of a daily regimen. Wrestlers come to the *akhara* early each morning to practice under the watchful eye of a guru or other senior *akhara* member. They rehearse moves and countermoves again and again with a range of variously qualified and weighty partners until the execution of a maneuver becomes a matter of habit. Lasting for about two or three hours, practice of this sort is referred to as *jor* (literally, exerting force). After *jor* is completed and the wrestler has bathed, he is enjoined to eat a mixture of *ghi* (clarified butter), milk, and ground almond paste or *chana* (chickpeas). These items, in conjunction with the other ingredients in a wrestler's diet, are known collectively as *khurak*. In the course of a day a wrestler who is at the peak of health can consume as much as two liters of milk, a half liter of *ghi*, and a kilogram or more of almonds, all in addition to his regular meals. Most wrestlers eat less than this, but those who have access to milk, *ghi*, and almonds—notably Yadav dairy farmers—make a habit of copious consumption. Most Hindu wrestlers are vegetarians and abjure tobacco, liquor, and other intoxicants, with the qualified exception of *bhang* (hashish).

After resting for a good part of the day, wrestlers return to the *akhara* in the early evening to begin their *vyayam* (exercise) routine. *Vyayam* consists of two primary exercises: *dands* (jack-knifing pushups) and *bethaks* (deep knee bends). There are various subtypes of each of these primary exercises, but in principle all are fairly simple. What is more significant than how each exercise is done is the number of each that the wrestler is called on to perform. A strong young wrestler will regularly do as many as 2000 *bethaks* and half as many *dands* a day. Each type of exercise is done in sets of 50 or 100. The rhythm remains constant for one and a half to two hours while the wrestler remains focused on one objective and fixed in one spot. A number of wrestlers pointed out the similarity between the focused concentration of *vyayam* and the metronomic recitation (*japna*) of sacred secret verses (*mantras*) in contemplative meditation.<sup>7</sup> Once the *vyayam* routine is completed, the wrestler bathes, rests, eats an evening meal, and is asleep by eight or nine at night.

Although *vyayam*, *khurak*, and *jor* are clearly articulated aspects of the wrestler's regimen, even the most minute facet of the wrestler's life is linked directly to his psychosomatic identity. When, where, and how to defecate, bathe, brush one's teeth, walk, talk, and sleep are only a few of the daily imponderabilia for which wrestling provides specific guidelines. It is essential to keep in mind that most contemporary wrestlers are, of necessity, also shopkeepers, policemen, postal clerks, electricians, purveyors of coal and gunnysack material, college teachers, railway clerks, and porters, as well as peasant farmers and dairymen: in other words, your average wrestler is, in an important way, also your average man on the street, or at least the two are not antithetical. While the obligations of work and family pose important time constraints on the wrestler's exercise regimen, there is a close correlation between being a good, healthy

wrestler and being a productive, self-motivated worker. The mundane terms of everyday life inextricably bind the two arenas—although not always smoothly or coherently.

But the wrestler, so cast as a common man, is really unique when his structural position in society is taken into account. He is a social character cut in a preeminently asocial mode. Although a member of society with family ties, an occupation, and other responsibilities, the wrestler, like the *sannyasi*, is not concerned with his position in the domains of caste or class. *Akharas* are frequented by men with doctorates and those who are illiterate; by the sons of wealthy entrepreneurs and the sons of railway porters; by Brahmins, Rajputs, Yadavs, and Chamars; by Hindus and Muslims. While Yadav dairy farmers are more likely to wrestle than either Chamars or Brahmins, wrestlers are almost always vocal opponents of caste segregation, religious communalism, and class chauvinism. Although their rhetoric on this point is often very compelling, what is most visually dramatic is the close and intimate physical contact that wrestling requires, a contact which demands a reassessment of notions of purity and pollution. The anticaste drama of wrestling (which I have discussed in detail elsewhere [Alter In press a]) provides the wrestler with an explicitly nonhierarchical framework in which to situate his actions; and this, too, means that the *sannyasi* and the wrestler are speaking the same language.

Ideally, in becoming a wrestler one renounces other markers of identity in favor of a more general, basic sense of self, one that is neither social—in the sense of institutionalized roles and obligations—nor directly implicated in hierarchies of status and power. In other words, the wrestler's self-concept is highly individualistic.

### ***sannyasis* and wrestlers**

Both wrestling and *sannyas* are chosen life paths. As the final stage in the ideal Hindu life cycle, *sannyas* is an elective path that relatively few Hindus follow. The option of renouncing the world is, however, theoretically open to anyone at any time of his life (Ghurye 1964:78). When a boy becomes a wrestler—which may mean joining an *akhara*, recognizing a guru, or, more generally, disciplining himself through exercise, diet, and devotion—he thinks of what he is doing as a total commitment to a distinct way of life. It is somewhat surprising that *sannyas* is the model for this commitment, since one would expect that *brahmacharya* (adolescent discipleship) would be the more appropriate model (cf. Kakar 1981). While certain aspects of a young wrestler's life do fit the pattern of *brahmacharya*—absolute devotion and loyalty to one's guru, for example—the discipline of wrestling is all-encompassing and not restricted to the *gurukul*-like atmosphere of the *akhara*.<sup>8</sup> Thus, while many wrestlers are of the appropriate age to assume a *brahmachari* status, the fact that they have turned their backs on worldly pursuits and are actively engaged in a specific type of self-discipline—which is in no way designed to prepare a boy for becoming a *garhasthya*—makes *sannyas* the more appropriate analogue.

That *brahmacharya* does not serve as a model for the wrestler's identity is also a consequence of *akhara* demographics. While many wrestlers are between 15 and 18 years old, a wrestler who has made a name for himself may continue to wrestle well into his thirties. Moreover, older men who wrestled competitively in their youth often return to the *akhara* in later years to wrestle purely for exercise. The ideology of wrestling and the interpretation of self-discipline are largely the product of these senior wrestlers' reflections on the younger wrestlers' more rigorous, direct experience.

Wrestlers argue that they are like *sannyasis* because they subject their bodies to a similar disciplinary regimen. The wrestler's regimen encodes a certain set of values in the wrestler's physique; somaticity, that is, is the locus of the wrestler/*sannyasi* analogy, an analogy that extends from the most banal and mundane to the most subtle.

## appearances

On a superficial and often farcical level, wrestlers believe that they resemble *sannyasis*. Both *sannyasis* and wrestlers wear *langots* (g-strings) and go about their routines in a state of near nakedness. Just as *sannyasis* cover themselves with the ashes from sacrificial fires and funeral pyres (cf. Parry 1982b), so wrestlers cover their bodies in *akhara* earth. While the elements differ substantially, both are charged with *vibhuti* (power). The formal appearance of a besmeared body is enough to make the analogy operative.

The qualities of the earth are important to the wrestler. Pure *akhara* earth is regarded as a tonic and is applied to the body as a curative agent. It draws out heat and poison and imparts a general sense of well-being. Covering one's sweat-saturated body with earth has powerful emotive value. Wrestlers talk at length of the sense of comfort and satisfaction that is experienced on this visceral level. While they employ powerful images of protection and security to explain their identification with the earth of the pit—which is always spoken of in strongly maternal terms—they also describe “rolling in the earth” and “rubbing oneself with earth” as quintessentially sensory experiences that bring everybody down to the same level of elemental unity. Occasionally the experience is likened to that of the farmer who lives close to the earth and who, as one commentator put it, “daily feels the soil between his toes and the dust on his hands”; but more often it is likened to that of the *sannyasi* who, having chosen to relinquish the luxury of shelter, lives, sleeps, and eats on the bare ground. The wrestler, like the *sannyasi*, is “down to earth” in this sense. As Atreya writes:

The Indian wrestler who returns to the earth is a true *sadhu*; he is a truly great sage and *yogi*. . . .

He who has even once experienced the satisfaction of the earth cannot forget the feeling. The benefits of practicing in the earth are incomprehensible. Great wisdom, strength and energy are all derived from the *akhara* earth. He who abides by a regimen of wrestling in the earth remains youthful forever. . . . He is able to look on problems from the vantage point of a *jivan mukta* [literally, one who is released or freed from life, an ascetic]. [1972:32–33]

Like some *sannyasis*, wrestlers shave their heads completely or at least have their hair cut very short. Though many *sannyasis* have long hair rather than no hair at all, *sannyasis* and wrestlers alike are distinguished from other men by their radical attitude toward hair as a symbol of identity. Why wrestlers are concerned with cutting and oiling their hair is as complex a question as why some *sannyasis* let their hair grow matted and long (cf. Obeyesekere 1981). Short hair—in conjunction with a range of other symbols—represents the vitality of radically controlled sexual energy; it also symbolizes the wrestler's disregard for worldly fashion (Alter 1989:ch. 5, In press b).

Despite these similarities, one would not be very likely to mistake a *sannyasi* for a wrestler. While a wrestler is big, bulky, and muscular, a *sannyasi* is, at least in the popular imagination, a thin *yogi*. The *sannyasi* has a unique costume: ocher robe, staff, *rudraksha* beads, and begging bowl (Ghurye 1964:106). Moreover, *sannyasis* do not work. They beg for a living and are peripatetic, whereas wrestlers hold jobs, live in communities, and are family members. There is thus an element of farce in the analogy between the wrestler and the *sannyasi*.<sup>9</sup>

## exercise, *asans*, and austerity

A primary dimension of *sannyas* is *tapas*, or *tap*: the performance of austerities that produce the “heat” of enlightened consciousness. *Tap* takes various forms, and many authors have grown enamored of the exotic nature of the *sannyasi*'s self-mortification: the ubiquitous bed of nails, self-mutilation, flagellation, and extended fasting, to name but a few of the less imaginative forms (cf. Oman 1905). It is doubtful that the public performance of such austerities has ever been a primary dimension of *sannyas*, except, perhaps, at fairs and pilgrimage centers. The spectacle of mortification may, indeed, be linked to specific historical forces and regional

trends. Moreover, the nature of the *sannyasi's* mortification has been misunderstood on account of its often spectacular, exotic form. As Staal has noted, the *sannyasi*, unlike his Franciscan counterpart in Europe, does not do penance in order to expiate sin; he engages in a form of self-control—in the most extended, corporeal sense of this term—that is directed at a manifest mastery of the very substances of life (1983–84:35; also see Parry 1989; van der Veer 1989:460). When a *sannyasi* sits under cold running water for days on end during the dead of winter or meditates while lying on a bed of nails, he is not making atonement or abusing himself. He is, rather, extending sensory control to the end of self-realization by way of reconstituting the individual substantial self on a transcendental plane.

As with physical appearance and dietary practice, the wrestler compares himself to the *sannyasi* on the mundane, substantial level of *tapas*. The physical regimen of exercise is, as he sees it, analogous to the *sannyasi's* austerity. On a number of occasions I was told that being a wrestler was like “chewing iron *chana*”: an arduous undertaking that has merit only in its own terms. Others said that as a wrestler one had to “wear a necklace of pain”—a somewhat oxymoronic metaphor suggesting the emblematic character of physical fitness as a form of austerity. In any case, wrestlers spend hours exercising and wrestling, and they link these acts directly to a notion of *sannyasi*-like self-discipline. Commenting on this point in general, Atreya writes:

*Rishis* [sages] have provided us with a divine insight: a consciousness of the body as integral to life as a whole. They knew that one could not progress even one step toward self-realization without a good, strong and healthy body. It is for this reason that exercise is a form of religion in India. [1971:27–28]

Fitness, however, is cast in a particular light. The wrestler is not only big, strong, and healthy, he is also balanced and refined. A wrestler who is regarded as having successfully endured the “necklace of pain” is said to have a “body of one color” (*ek rang ka sharir*). Color here refers only in part to the radiant, uniform glow of healthy skin. It refers equally to the fluid musculature of a body that is not separated into distinct anatomical parts; to the properly proportioned thickness of thighs, chest, neck, elbows, and ankles; to an energetic biogenetic balance of the three psychosomatic properties, *sattva* (white, cool, calm, pristine), *raja* (agitated, red, aggressive), and *tama* (dull, dark, lethargic); to a certain bright clearness in the eyes, a spring to the step, and an attitude of composure and control. In explicit comparison to the heated energy produced by the *sannyasi's tapas*, the “body of one color” is often described as *ojasvi*—radiant with vital energy.

At face value the body of the *sannyasi* stands diametrically opposed to this icon of health and strength. The gaunt, emaciated figure of the *sannyasi* would almost seem to mock the wrestler's overt corporeality. And yet, despite obvious differences in form, the two types of disciplined body have an underlying structural similarity. The key lies in the somatic philosophy of yoga.

Raja yoga is a complex theory of self-realization achieved through meditation and a type of physical culture—stretching, breathing, bending—known as *asan vyayam*. One learns the various *asan* positions in order to transcend consciousness by developing a body that is in perfect balance (cf. Kakar 1981:16–36). Although yoga is not the exclusive province of the *sannyasi*, *sannyasis* are often the most accomplished practitioners of the art; it is a specific aspect of their more general *tap* regimen. When I asked wrestlers if their *vyayam* exercises corresponded to the *asan vyayam* of the yogi, they responded that the two activities belonged to different realms: a *bethak*, *dand*, or wrestling move was simply not an *asan*.<sup>10</sup>

However, yoga has a broader meaning, one that makes it more relevant to the concerns of the wrestler. What is important is not the form of bodily discipline but its more abstract objective: self-realization. In other words, on the plane of transcendent consciousness—harmonic integration with Brahman—the different shapes of the wrestler's and the *sannyasi's* bodies are incidental. In yogic terms, health is achieved through, but not in, the body. While wrestlers employ some elementary aspects of yogic physical culture in the form of *pranayama* (breath control), they consider wrestling a subdiscipline of yoga in its broadest, nonsomatic sense—

that is, as a general philosophy of health consciousness. The coordinates of this philosophy are the moral, intellectual, and emotional principles of fitness known as *yama* and *niyama* (Atreya 1965:11).<sup>11</sup> *Yama* and *niyama* mandate a moral code of conduct that includes, among other things, continence, honesty, internal and external cleanliness, and the contemplation of God. A *sannyasi* who practices *asans* without *yama* and *niyama* is simply a thin, lithe man, just as a person who does *dands* without adherence to *yama* and *niyama* is not a wrestler but a corporeal brute. Both forms of discipline take on significant meaning only from this common point of reference where morals and muscles meet.

While wrestling may be a part of yoga in this sense, the wrestler and the *sannyasi* nonetheless understand the body in very different ways. The *sannyasi's* attitude toward his body is transcendental. This does not mean that he sees or tries to see his body as illusionary; in fact, as Staal has indicated (1983–84), transcendent self-realization is a function of a multilayered symbiosis of mind and body, rather than a sublimation of the physical body by the intellectual mind. Transcendence is achieved not by a mystical arithmetic of mind over matter but by a complete synthesis of these two aspects in the whole person of the ascetic. *Samadhi*, in which the body appears lifeless but is not dead, reflects this perfect state of somatic transcendent consciousness. What the *sannyasi* has achieved is a complete dissolution of self into the ultimate reality of Brahman. Having achieved *mukti* (release), he is freed from the endless cycle of *sam-sara* (rebirth).

In tune with the general principles of *yama* and *niyama*, the wrestler is certainly sympathetic to this kind of self-dissolution. In fact, many *akharas* have shrines commemorating the *samadhis* of former wrestlers. Although I was unable to discern whether these were the *samadhis* of wrestlers who later became ascetics or of ascetics who were in some sense wrestlers, what is noteworthy is that the two dimensions are enough alike to warrant direct and easy translation. That is, it is perfectly logical for a wrestler to achieve the end of a *sannyasi* with only a slight modification of terms. Significantly, Zarrilli has found this to be true among south Indian martial artists as well (1989:1307).

For the most part, however, the wrestler does not have a transcendent attitude toward his body. His is a manifest physico-moral identity firmly rooted in the ethical world of protocol and duty. Whereas the *sannyasi* comes to terms with himself in the godhead, the wrestler comes to terms with himself in the here and now of everyday life. As I have discussed more extensively elsewhere:<sup>12</sup>

A *sannyasi* trains his body so as to leave the world; the wrestler trains his body so as to be immune to worldly things but to remain in the world. The *sannyasi* moves away from the world, discarding the trappings of social life; the wrestler moves through the world, cloaking himself in a mantle of ascetic values. In this regard the wrestler's strength stands for many of the same things as the *sannyasi's* austerity. However, the wrestler's disciplinary practices—exercise, diet, self-control—are structured in manifest, social terms rather than in terms of transcendental abnegation. [Alter 1989:455]

## **brahmacharya**

If there is one thing which links wrestlers to *sannyasis*, it is that both categories of person advocate absolute celibacy. A key symbol of the *sannyasi's* world renunciation is his mastery of sensual desire. Significantly, the Hindu *sannyasi* does not renounce sexuality, at least primarily, on moral grounds. To be sure, he regards sex as polluting and sexual preoccupation as a sign of moral weakness, but to focus on pollution and morality is to focus on the mores and taboos of interpersonal contact. The *sannyasi* in fact sees sexuality as a central aspect of the integrated, energized body. Control over sexuality generates a different kind of physico-moral fortitude than does a total denial of sexuality, and it is the power of controlled sexuality with which the wrestler and the *sannyasi* are concerned.

In the Hindu worldview, semen is a vital force that plays an integral part in maintaining a person's overall health (Carstairs 1958; Edwards 1983; Kakar 1981; Obeyesekere 1976). In a

cosmological sense, semen is also a vital source of dynamic energy (*shakti*), part and parcel of the very substance which drives the universe (O'Flaherty 1973; Wadley 1975). By controlling his sexuality, the *sannyasi* is tapping into this powerful life force; by not engaging in sex, he stores up his semen and, through yoga and meditation, is able to channel its energy to the end of self-realization. Sex is not easily controlled, and diet in particular plays an important role in cooling the fires of passion and building up resilient sexual energy.

Because food is of such vital importance in many spheres of Hindu life (cf. Appadurai 1981; Daniel 1984; Marriott 1968, 1976; Zimmermann 1988), *sannyasis* consider its use, quality, and nature potentially dangerous. Food contains the essence of life-energy, which can either bring the body into harmonious balance or throw it into imbalance (cf. Parry 1989:500). The degree of harmony or imbalance is related to the *guna* (psychosomatic quality) of particular foods; some are designated as *sattva*, others as *raja*, and still others as *tama* (cf. Beck 1969; Khare 1976). Food also plays a crucial role insofar as it influences the balance of the three bodily humors—wind, bile, and phlegm. An imbalance in the body, caused either by a preponderance of one or another *guna* or by the action of an enraged or inhibited humor, results in some form of illness (cf. Daniel 1984:173–175; Kakar 1981:47–49; Raheja 1988:46–47).<sup>13</sup>

For the *sannyasi* and the wrestler, somatic imbalance is most dangerous as it relates to sexual energy. Sexuality has to be carefully controlled and therefore a particular diet must be followed; to eat haphazardly is to run the risk of losing control. As a general rule, *sannyasis* eat very little of anything, and they tend to eat fairly benign items. They subscribe to the disciplinary regimen of fasting.

By contrast, wrestlers are extraordinary eaters of specific types of food: *ghi*, milk, and almonds, as mentioned above, but also fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains, and other standard items. On one level wrestlers eat to put on bulk and to develop muscle. Stories abound about famous wrestlers who could consume upward of a 25-kilogram canister of *ghi* in a week and of wrestlers in the Punjab whose monthly ration included 40 kilograms of almonds. Even less spectacular diets are still remarkable. Many wrestlers consider two liters of milk and a half kilogram of *ghi* per day normal fare.

With regard to type and quantity of food the wrestler and the *sannyasi* seem to be diametrical opposites, a fact that, again, contributes to the farcical aspect of the analogy. But in order for the farce to work there must be a fundamental similarity between these seemingly opposed dietetics. The similarity can be found in part in the wrestler and the *sannyasi's* common concern with balance and harmony.

As primary ingredients in the wrestler's diet, milk and *ghi* are powerful symbols of sexual energy. Elsewhere I have argued that the symbolic logic of wrestling life in general and its dietetics in particular is a highly complex dynamic of interrelated forces (Alter 1989:ch. 7). Simply put, however, wrestlers drink milk and eat *ghi* to build their store of energized semen. These two substances also lower the natural heat of the invigorated body so that once built up, the store of semen will not be spilled, spent, or wasted but be channeled into the development of a strong, healthy physique. What the wrestler achieves by copious consumption the *sannyasi* achieves by opposite means. By fasting the *sannyasi* is able both to channel and to develop the power of his semen—semen produced not by means of exercise and eating but by means of the heat generated by meditation and various forms of austerity.

There is another, more immediate basis for drawing a comparison between these two dietetics: both the wrestler and the *sannyasi* are dependent on others for food. While the *sannyasi* begs and receives donations of "leftover" food, the wrestler depends either on his family resources or on the resources of a patron. Unlike the *sannyasi*, the wrestler does not accept food from just anyone; he does not completely dissociate himself from the world of food transactions and responsibilities by begging. For the wrestler, eating remains a social act insofar as he is dependent on a specific class of donor. Ideally, a wrestler should not have to work but should be supported by members of his family. He has a vested interest in, but no direct responsibility



for, the cows and buffalos his father or patron owns. Significantly, the food that the wrestler accepts from his family is supposed to be in a raw, unprocessed form. The wrestler must make his meals with his own hands, for if someone else prepares his food it may be contaminated with dangerous emotions. As one wrestler told me, "If you eat food prepared by a lustful person, you yourself will become lustful." Thus, the wrestler is a somewhat marginal family member, at once dependent and independent, a consumer but not a producer.<sup>14</sup> In effect the wrestler is a kind of *sannyasi*-within-the-family character. Consider this passage from Jawalamast Pahalwan's biography:

Although he came from a family of modest means, his brothers had achieved a degree of prosperity. Even so, Jawalamast only took enough from them to support himself as a wrestler. The rest he left in their hands. This ascetic, simple and honest man devoted himself completely to wrestling. Never marrying or otherwise encumbering himself with worldly obligations, he worked to uplift wrestling until he left this world in 1900. [Malhotra 1981:33–34]

Wrestlers regulate not only diet but a whole range of behavior in order to keep the fire of passion from raging out of control. Regular defecation, bathing in cool rather than warm water, washing one's feet before sleeping, not sleeping on a full stomach, not riding tandem on a bicycle, not watching animals copulate, and, as far as possible, avoiding the company of women are all prescriptions for achieving celibacy. K. P. Singh points out that wrestlers fully appreciate the virtue of a "regular routine" in controlling their sexuality:

For [the wrestler] sex is like a celluloid image—fleeting and without substance. His mind is like a cinema screen which remains pure white despite a myriad of flashing images. . . . His task is rigorous and he remains well detached from the colorful world. [1972:26–27]

While the mundane mandate of a desexualized everyday life is fairly consistent and straightforward, the issue of sexuality becomes more complex when the wrestler's diet and *vyayam* regimen are examined together. Wrestlers tend to disagree about the connection between *vyayam*, *khurak*, and self-control: some argue that a diet of *ghi*, milk, and almonds is by nature *sattva* and thus does not inflame passion; others, however, are not so sure, for they recognize that anything in large quantities—even milk and *ghi*—can cause an imbalance in the bodily humors, an imbalance that may lead to inflamed sexuality. Moreover, buffalo milk, from which most commercial *ghi* is made, is not as *sattva* as cow milk, which is problematic in its own right.

For the most part, wrestlers argue that *vyayam* is a mechanism by which the dynamic energy of food is changed into the potential energy of stamina and physical strength. Significantly, exercise also changes food into semen and generates heat that can throw the body into drastic imbalance, exciting one's sexual passion. The wrestler thus tries to create more and more highly energized semen while ensuring that the energy manifests itself as "the body of one color" rather than as sensual lust. Although there is no direct parallel between the fire of *raja* passion and a body overheated by exercise or overfilled with food, wrestlers feel that careful management is required to keep one from turning into the other. In a sense, then, when wrestlers are exercising and eating they are playing with fire. For this reason the *akhara* provides a cool, soothing atmosphere where the earth of the pit absorbs the sweat of potential passion and the water of the well reintegrates the wrestler into the more stable, temperate climate of everyday life.

In all, the wrestler must walk a fine line between developing his strength and controlling his sexual passion. In this regard he differs from the *sannyasi*: whereas the *sannyasi* controls his sexuality in absolute terms, the wrestler invokes his sexuality in order to change it into the manifest terms of his social identity. I was told a number of times that wrestlers found it far more difficult to be celibate than *sannyasis* did. Not only must wrestlers live in the world, but they must actually tempt fate. As one wrestler explained:

A wrestler's life is like that of a *sadhu*. The *sadhu* lives in his hermitage. He worships and does his prayers. The wrestler lives in his house and is entangled in the world of *maya* [illusion]. He is in the *garhasthya*

*ashrama*. Even in this condition he must practice self-control. The *sadhu* lives apart from the world. The wrestler lives in a house, but he must dissociate himself from the concerns of a householder. He must close his eyes to it [his household responsibility] and wrestle. The wrestler and the *sadhu* are alike because they must both remove themselves from the *garhasthya ashrama* and be absorbed in God. And yet the wrestler is tied to his family. He must live close to his wife [when he does get married] and yet turn away from temptation. A person will never be a wrestler until he becomes like a *sadhu* and averts his eyes and closes his mouth to the world.

The *sannyasi*'s celibacy is metaphysical to the extent that it is a means to an end, one step on the road to self-realization. In contrast, the wrestler's checked sexuality is integrated into his manifest social identity. It becomes emblematic of who he is and what he advocates in addition to being an aspect of his regimen.<sup>15</sup>

### ***bhang, bhog, masti, shauk***

In her historical study of leisure among the artisans of Banaras, Kumar includes a chapter on the place of *akhara* culture in urban life (1988:111–124). She shows that the *akhara* regimen is part of a system of refined pleasure known as *bahri alang*, or “going to the outside.” *Bahri alang* is a kind of structured, almost affected leisure, involving not only established cultural activities such as drama, music, and religious ceremony but also more mundane pursuits from which men get visceral and aesthetic satisfaction—bathing, defecating, washing clothes. From the perspective of *bahri alang*, the culture of the *akhara*, which Kumar rightly characterizes as “multifunctional and multivocal” (1988:112), is “strictly a matter of *shauk*”—that is, a hobby or an infatuation.

The *shauk* of the Banarsi is, of course, a very serious affair, and one should not assume that making a “hobby” of such mundane activities as bathing and washing clothes is in any sense petty or insignificant. However, one must distinguish between those for whom wrestling is purely *shauk* and those for whom it is a form of disciplined self-development. This distinction is, I think, implicit in Kumar's discussion, for she emphasizes the “regimen” aspect of *akhara* activities (1988:115)—diet, exercise, and wrestling—just as she talks about the pleasure derived from covering oneself with mud or from reflectively relaxing in the shade of a tree.

In my experience, the “*shaukiya* wrestler”—preoccupied with pleasure and aesthetic self-gratification—can be easily distinguished from the disciplined wrestler who abides by a balanced regimen of copious consumption, does hundreds and hundreds of *dands* and *bethaks*, and daily engages in an hour or more of physically exhausting wrestling practice. The *shaukiya* wrestler is concerned more with “feeling good”—in the deeply important sense of which Kumar writes—than with developing a strong, disciplined physique. In the city of Banaras the distinction between pleasure and discipline has to some extent become blurred, but comparative material from Delhi and Dehra Dun, as well as the popular literature on wrestling published in Delhi, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh, firmly supports the contention that wrestlers see their program as one of dispassionate self-control (Atreya 1978; Dev 1972; Krishnananda 1985; Pathak 1974). Although the disciplined wrestler and the Banarsi *shaukiya* have much in common in terms of their respective *akhara* experiences, they differ fundamentally in their perception of how what they do relates to who they are. Their uses of and attitudes toward *bhang* (hashish), for example, reflect these differing perceptions.

Kumar says that every *akhara* must have a place where *bhang* is prepared for postpractice consumption (1988:112). In a similar vein, Lynch notes that *bhang* consumption is an important part of the *mastram* identity of Mathura's wrestling Chaube Brahmins (1990:101). He convincingly demonstrates how *bhang* induces or enhances the emotional passion of *masti*, which, as the Chaubes experience it, is “a care-free lifestyle with a sense of emotional and physical well being” (1990:98). As Lynch indicates, many Indians regard *bhang* as “morally good” and “religiously valuable” (1990:100), and some believe that the intoxication it produces is *sattva* in nature. Moreover, since *bhang* is a religious substance that is said to be used regularly by

Lord Shiva and Krishna's brother Balram, devotees may legitimately consume it in the context of worship and devotion. On this level of interpretation, Lynch argues that *bhāṅg* intoxication serves to conflate religious experience with a powerful emotional state:

To drink a heavy dose [of *bhāṅg*] is to actualize and experience an emotional oneness, peace, nonattachment, and true self-awareness approaching the blissful pleasure (*ananda*) that is union with divinity and self-integration. [Lynch 1990:101]

It is easy to see how this kind of experience can also be part of the Banarsi ethos of which Kumar writes (1985, 1986:50–51).

While the *māṣṭi* of *bhāṅg* intoxication is considered essentially good and wholesome, Lynch notes, drinking marijuana also makes one “lusty” or sexually impassioned (1990:101). Chaubes, among others (cf. Marglin 1990; Toomey 1990), feel that eroticism is not antithetical to ascetic ideals. Among the Rasik Ramanandi ascetics of whom van der Veer writes, the notion of emotional passion as a form of ascetic service is highly developed (1989:463, 464). Shiva of course exemplifies the synthesis of these “logical contraries” (O’Flaherty 1973).

All this said, the information I gathered on wrestling in Banaras, Delhi, and Dehra Dun indicates that wrestlers—some of whom are Chaubes and some of whom are Banarsi *shaukiyas*—have an ambivalent attitude toward *bhāṅg*. Their ambivalence stems from the fact that *bhāṅg* induces the passion of *māṣṭi* on the one hand and the focused concentration of ascetic *tapas* on the other. Whereas many Indian individuals and groups are comfortable with the inherent tension of this symbiosis, disciplined wrestlers are not. On the whole they tend to take a dogmatic stand on the issue, arguing that a wrestler may take *bhāṅg* only when the regular regimen of *akḥara* activities fails to establish a refined balance of emotion, physical development, and moral propriety. If, for example, a young wrestler has difficulty controlling his sexuality, *bhāṅg* may be prescribed as a remedy of last resort. In other words, *bhāṅg* is not an integral part of the wrestler’s regimen.

As I pointed out at the beginning of this article, wrestlers tend to see ascetic renunciation in absolute, black-and-white terms. Somewhat naively, they interpret the ascetic’s use of *bhāṅg* in terms of a rigid opposition between emotion and discipline. In their view, *bhāṅg* should simply be a calming agent, an anaphrodisiac by means of which the *sannyasi*-like wrestler may achieve greater self-control. They view *bhāṅg* used in the context of recreation or leisure as a dangerous narcotic not unlike liquor or tobacco, the consumption of which produces addiction and the wanton *bhog* (enjoyment) of pure self-indulgence (Atreya 1975a, 1975b).

While many of the *akḥaras* in Banaras have an area for grinding and preparing *bhāṅg*, I have never seen wrestlers preparing or using *bhāṅg* in their *akḥaras*. It is certainly possible to reconcile the attributes and effects of *bhāṅg* with *akḥara* culture in general. For the *mastram* Chaube, physical exercise and *bhāṅg* intoxication are emotionally complementary. For the Banarsi *shaukiya*, *bhāṅg*, earth, and water enhance the mood of reflective leisure. But for the disciplined wrestler such uses of *bhāṅg* entail too much dangerous emotion. One wrestler I spoke with stated explicitly that the regimen of wrestling was quite distinct from the *shaukiya* aspect of various leisure activities. He went on to say that consuming *bhāṅg* would turn the regimen of wrestling into just another form of leisure, like going to popular films, wearing stylish clothes, or flying kites.

### **akḥaras and akḥaras**

Although the term *akḥara* usually refers to a wrestling gymnasium, monastic *sannyasi* organizations are also known as *akḥaras*. In its monastic sense the term is most often used to distinguish between various groups of Naga *sannyasis*, who are a subgroup of the larger Dasnami order (Ghurye 1964:6). Of particular interest is the fact that many of these Dasnami *sannyasi* *akḥaras* took an active part in defending Hindu shrines from Muslim invaders at various times

during the eras of Mogul and British imperialism (Ghosh 1930; Ghurye 1964:110–127; Lorenzen 1978; Sarkar 1950; van der Veer 1987). Whatever the details of their complex history, it is clear that *sannyasi akharas* were—at various times and to various degrees—training schools in the martial arts and weaponry (Ghurye 1964:116). And the *sannyasis* did not simply take up arms in self-defense. For the Nagas in particular, fighting became an integral aspect of the ascetic identity. The Nagas were able to translate their *tap* into truncheons, in a kind of religious inversion of the swords into plowshares progression, and to put their skill at developing an immunity to pain to use in offensive combat (Ghurye 1964:122). The practice of various martial arts—club swinging, lancing, swordplay, archery, and wrestling—remained consistent with the general notion of self-realization through renunciation.

Contemporary Nagas continue to practice various martial arts in a less combative environment. As Ghurye notes, some monastic *akharas* sponsor wrestling, gymnastics, and other forms of exercise (1964:127). In the course of my research I saw one Naga *akhara* where, ironically, the *sannyasis* wrestled along with a number of Muslim, Brahman, Thakur, and Yadav “secular” wrestlers. There is also a defunct Naga wrestling *akhara* on the bank of the Ganges at Manikarnika Ghat in Banaras. A single room with an earthen floor, it appears to have been an *akhara* in the wrestling sense, but one used by those who were affiliated with a larger Naga *akhara* in an ascetic, monastic sense.

However, despite the obvious parallels of form and content, wrestlers told me repeatedly and without exception that the two types of *akhara* had nothing to do with each other (cf. also Kumar 1988:118). I did not have the opportunity to solicit the opinion of the Nagas on this matter, but wrestlers explained that Nagas do not compete, nor do they consume milk and almonds in large quantities: they are *sannyasis* first, practicing wrestling only as an ancillary form of self-discipline. Although secular wrestlers are unanimous in opposing themselves to the wrestling Nagas in these terms, van der Veer (personal communication) has observed that at least some Ramanandi Naga *sannyasis* wrestle competitively and, presumably, eat a diet much like that advocated by the secular wrestlers of Banaras. In his collection of wrestler biographies, Malhotra recounts the history of Mangal Das, a wrestling *sannyasi* who trained in one of the many *akharas* around the Hanumanghari temple in Ayodhya. Malhotra’s account is rather ambiguous, for it never says that Mangal Das was an ascetic in the Naga sense—although of this there is little doubt—but it does say that Mangal Das was a wrestler who lived in, trained with, and was revered by the community of *sannyasis* in Ayodhya.

With these complex and seemingly contradictory cases in mind, we may well ask why “secular” wrestlers find it so important to maintain the fiction of a sharp distinction between themselves and *sannyasis* who wrestle. The answer lies in the wrestler’s understanding of asceticism. From the perspective of the householder, a *sannyasi* is someone who has renounced the world, someone who (given a strict interpretation) has no ties to community, state, or nation. In terms of power—to achieve enlightenment, magically influence the course of events, change form, and so on—the *sannyasi* is a pure individual whose relationship to God and “Self” is more important than his relationship to other people or the institutions of society. The wrestler, however, clearly identifies himself as a family and community member, as a member of society. From the wrestler’s perspective, wrestling should not be directed purely toward spiritual transcendence; it should be integrated into the world of everyday life; it should transcend the monastery. The Nagas threaten to undermine wrestling’s social significance by turning the whole thing into just another form of ascetic self-control. Put another way, the wrestler must be able to discipline his body without becoming a *sannyasi*, even though his discipline is very *sannyasi*-like. So, from the disciplined wrestler’s perspective, the two *akharas* are homonymic, and the analogy between them is something on the order of a complex pun on the nature of power. K. P. Singh, one of the most poetic writers on the subject of wrestling, weaves together these parallel meanings thus:

A wrestler should not only be a wrestler. He should do other work as well, and he should make himself capable of that work. Then people in other walks of life will become familiar with wrestling and will turn to it. In this way wrestling will not be exclusive but will become public and inclusive. Everyone will enjoy it and will experience the satisfaction it imparts because they will have no sense of its limitations. Whether it is wrestling in the *akhara*, reading deeply in books, or contemplating serious issues, all ways of navigating the ocean of life will be regarded as having equal merit. A g-string and a begging bowl are the symbols of renunciation, symbols in accordance with which the wrestler too must develop an aversion to the routine of life. Wealth and luxury must be dealt a fatal blow. The lamp of asceticism must be lighted. In short, servitude and slavery must not be tolerated under any condition. [1972–73:15]

## Hanuman and the ascetic *bhakta*

Every wrestling *akhara* is dedicated to Lord Hanuman, the heroic warrior-disciple of the God-king Ram.<sup>16</sup> As van der Veer notes, the story of Ram's exile, as described in Tulsi Das's *Ramacaritamansa*, is a story of the power of detachment played out in a world alive with passion, intrigue, and deception (1989:462). Although Ram, his brother Lakshman, and Hanuman are all cast in the role of ascetic, Hanuman's ascetic power—his ability to change form at will and his superhuman strength—is embodied to a greater degree than Ram's or Lakshman's. Where Hanuman is said to be as big as a mountain, with thighs the size of tree trunks, Ram is at once more humanly incarnate—in terms of his stature and mobility—and more nearly supernatural and incomprehensible on the level of divine consciousness.

The source of Hanuman's divine power is his absolute celibacy, his total control over the latent energy (*shakti*) of semen (van der Veer 1989:463; Wolcott 1978). It is in this sense that Hanuman is an ascetic, a fact clearly reflected in the disciplinary practices of the various Ramanandi *sannyasi* suborders described by van der Veer. The Tyagis in particular seek to "ignite" the heat of *tapas* by internalizing the power of semen (1989:462–464). Similarly, Nagas see celibacy as central to the disciplinary practice of wrestling and exercise through which they "refine their bodies" (1989:463).

What is unique about Hanuman's asceticism is that it is couched in terms of service and devotion to Ram. As I have written elsewhere (Alter In press a, In press b), Hanuman's character is defined in terms of three interrelated attributes: *shakti*, *bhakti* (devotionalism), and *brahmacharya*. Significantly, these attributes become powerful agencies for action only when conceived in terms of Ram's overarching divinity. Without Ram, Hanuman has no power of any kind. For the Ramanandi Nagas and Tyagis, Hanuman serves as a model of devotion and service to Ram's ultimate divinity. Thus, as van der Veer observes, the Ramanandi takes on the role of Hanuman and other actors in the larger "devotional theater" of the Ram story, so transforming "the desires that motivate human action into positive, devotional energy" (1989:465, 462). In other words, the Ramanandis' is a program of self-realization couched purely and unequivocally in terms of individual religious experience.

As van der Veer clearly argues, devotional discipline is eminently concerned with a refined elaboration of aesthetics and emotion; among the Ramanandis, humility and servitude "must be refined in a devotional sentiment of total surrender" (1989:465). Hanuman is the perfect embodiment of such emotion, and the Ramanandi is rightly characterized as an impassioned slave of Ram. For the wrestler, however, Hanuman is an object of devotion and service in his own right rather than simply a conduit to the greater—and more abstract—glory of Ram's love. Much of the popular mythology about Hanuman derives from Tulsi Das's corpus and is therefore couched in terms of the Ram story. However, as evidenced by other strains of scripture, myth, and folklore, Hanuman is considered an incarnation of Shiva (Dixit 1978:11–17). Wrestlers tend to emphasize this side of Hanuman's character, a side that brings Shiva's ascetic qualities into sharp focus. In *akhara* temples, Shiva *lingams* (phallic icons) are often found in close association with Hanuman figures, and during the daily morning incantation Shiva's name is invoked more often than Ram's. When asked about their relationship to Hanuman, wrestlers say that they derive their skill, strength, energy, and wisdom from "thinking on him." In other

words, when wrestlers think of themselves as *sannyasi*-like, they think more in terms of the independent Shiva analogue than in terms of the Naga or Tyagi *sannyasi*'s Ram-oriented service and devotional asceticism.

Moreover, service and devotion become somewhat "secularized" in the wrestling arena. By secular I do not mean nonreligious, for Hanuman's form is worshiped in the *akhara* and his power and knowledge are sought by means of both ritual and devotion. For the wrestler, Hanuman becomes an integral part of everyday emotional experience. He is substantially, formally, empirically, and sensually present at all times in all places. As wrestlers repeatedly pointed out, there is no such thing as a representation—a symbol—of Hanuman. In a tactile and emotional sense a "calendar art" image of Hanuman *is* Hanuman, just as a book about Hanuman *is* Hanuman; this fact was brought home to me when a wrestler ran his hand through the pages of one of my Hanuman worship manuals, touching the words in the same way as, on other occasions, he touched the *akhara* earth or the vermilion paste with which he anointed Hanuman in the *akhara*.

In the context of the *akhara*, Hanuman is the nexus of what it means to be of service, to be humble, to be strong, to be celibate. And he is all of these things in a way that is both highly personal and, fundamentally, of public significance. One must not only "think on Hanuman" but also "act like Hanuman"; celibacy, humility, and service become moral virtues and character traits rather than simply spiritual exercises mandated by a particular form of ascetic devotionism. To be sure, this sociomoral dimension does not indicate a radical change in the fundamentally somatic terms of the respective disciplinary regimens. What has changed is that the purely individualistic emotion of the *bhakta* (devotee) has become the wrestler's impassioned commitment to morality in everyday life.

## conclusion

Aside from its obvious sportive dimension, which I have not considered here, wrestling is largely a matter of defining the self by selectively attributing value to certain ideals and somatic principles. As Khare has noted with respect to the Chamars of Lucknow, *sannyas* provides a powerful conceptual framework for social criticism in general and the reworking of caste identity in particular. The Chamar's critique is effective because, as Dumont has noted (1960, 1970), *sannyas* is a central category in the larger structure of Hindu society; rethinking what it means to be a *sannyasi* can, therefore, be a way of undermining the ideological edifice of hierarchical relations. As a pure individual who has renounced worldly obligations, the *sannyasi* is the antithesis of the caste-based *garhasthya*, whose identity is wholly the product of his ritual, familial, and social obligations. In a sense, the Chamar's radical nonbrahmanic interpretation of *sannyas* is based on a tacit recognition of the *sannyasi*'s key structural position in the logic of brahmanic Hinduism. Only because *sannyas* is a symbol of proto-equality does its integration into the subaltern world of the socially conscious Chamar make sense as a strategy of empowerment.

While the strict opposition between *sannyas* and *garhasthya*—the opposition on which this Dumontian critique is based—has been rightly criticized by a number of scholars (for example, Burghart 1983; van der Veer 1987), I found that many wrestlers offered a rather structural model of *sannyas* very much in keeping with Dumont's notion of complementary opposition. The wrestler cannot be a *sannyasi*, for he works, earns a living, and raises a family; yet he cannot simply be a *garhasthya*, for he must be celibate and must regularly countermand the prescripts of hierarchical separation by grappling—if he is a Brahman or Rajput—with men classified as impure. To an extent, then, wrestlers, like the Chamars of Lucknow, are guilty of reifying *sannyas* as a static category of being, an ideal type. Only in this way are they able to compare themselves to the *sannyasi* without blurring what are regarded as significant categorical differences between themselves and others.

What is unique about wrestling is its casting of self-definition in primarily somatic terms. What the wrestler borrows from the *sannyasi* is a self-conception rooted in a disciplinary mechanics of psychosomatic development. The tradition of those who have sought to integrate ascetic principles into social and political life is certainly a long one: the Chamars of Lucknow, among others—Gandhi, for instance—are clear examples. But in both Gandhian political philosophy and Chamar theology, advocacy gives rise to a purely intellectual ideology—a theory of practice that uses the body as a means of achieving certain changes in perception, but not as an end in itself. Wrestlers, on the other hand, conflate body discipline, self-perception, and ideology in a radical way and, in so doing, make a powerful statement about the essential connections between the individual, the body, and society as a whole.

## notes

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<sup>1</sup>Indian wrestling is certainly not exclusively Hindu. There are numerous Muslim wrestlers today, and in fact, many famous Indian wrestlers of the past—Gama, Imam Baksh, Sadiki—were Muslim (Ali 1984; B. Singh 1964). Hindu and Muslim wrestling differ very little from each other, and many wrestlers would argue that there is no significant difference at all. However, the wrestling way of life that I discuss in this article is Hindu in tone, character, and structure. Many of the general points about wrestling as such—diet, exercise, self-discipline, self-control—would apply equally to Muslim wrestlers, but the *sannyasi* analogy would not.

Although Indian wrestling is not exclusively Hindu, however, it is exclusively—and self-consciously—male. For this reason I deliberately use masculine pronouns throughout, even when referring to *sannyasis*. Although there are female *sannyasis*, wrestlers model themselves on a male prototype.

<sup>2</sup>In addition to the formal designation, *sannyasi*, wrestlers use a number of more or less synonymous colloquial designations. The term *sadhu* (mendicant) is very common, as is *baba* (father, grandfather, or ascetic). In some contexts the honorific *maharaj* (literally, great king) is used to designate a *sannyasi* of renown. The title *sant* (saint) may be given to a person whose status is equivalent to that of a *sannyasi*, the title *rishi* (sage) or *muni* (saint or hermit) to someone who is *sannyasi*-like in his character.

<sup>3</sup>For the wrestler, the *garhasthya* stage is the most problematic. It denotes a condition of duty-bound involvement in the spheres of ritual and sacrificial obligation, political association, and economic welfare. By implication a *garhasthya* is a person who is eminently worldly, a person who must deal with passion, sexuality, greed, and material gratification of all kinds.

Although wrestlers are familiar with the classical distinction between *vanaprastha* and *sannyasi*, they do not seem to use it to make sense of the ways in which particular ascetics act or to classify “grades” of ascetic behavior. A person is either a *garhasthya* or a *sannyasi*, but never a *vanaprastha*.

<sup>4</sup>Wrestling is primarily a northern Indian sport. As far as I have been able to determine, it is not particularly popular in the southern states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka. In the central part of India, Kolhapur, Sangli, Miraj, and other districts of Maharashtra are well known as wrestling centers, as are parts of Haryana, eastern Uttar Pradesh, and Bengal (cf. Rosselli 1980) in the north and east.

<sup>5</sup>“Going to the outside” is a colloquial phrase that refers to a constellation of leisure activities entailing participation in the open, public space of the Banaras urban environment. One goes outside to defecate, wash clothes, bathe, prepare *bhang*, visit temples, walk along the riverbank, swim, listen to music, and take part in many other forms of recreation.

<sup>6</sup>Wrestling in India dates back to at least the time at which the Mahabharata and Ramayana were composed in written form, and probably well before then (Muzumdar 1950; Raghavan 1979; Rai 1984; L. Singh 1982–83). Although early accounts of wrestling are scant and rather oblique, two texts, the 12th-century *Manasollasa* of King Somesvara (Srigondekar 1959) and the 13th-century *Mallapurana* of the Gujarati Jyesthimallas (Das 1968; Sandesara and Mehta 1964), provide fairly detailed outlines of *malla yuddha* during the early medieval period.

<sup>7</sup>Zarrilli has noted that the south Indian martial art of *kalarippayattu* explicitly recognizes the power of “single-point concentration” (*ekagrata*) (1989:1302). In fact, it seems that the practitioners of *kalarippay-*

*attu* conflate the spiritual dimension of meditation with the somatic discipline of exercise, training, and combat to a much greater and more comprehensive extent than do the north Indian wrestlers.

<sup>8</sup>A *gurukul* is a Hindu institution of education modeled on the relationship between a guru and his disciples. In a *gurukul*, disciples are cast in the mold of devout adolescent *brahmacharis* who regard their guru as the source of absolute truth.

<sup>9</sup>The farcical nature of this relationship was played out on various occasions in one Banaras *akhara* I regularly visited. A *sannyasi* would come to the *akhara* to bathe and cover himself with earth before spending the better part of the late afternoon walking through the city begging for alms. While he was in the pit applying earth to his body, some of the wrestlers would entice him to engage in a little friendly wrestling. Inevitably one of the wrestlers would put a quick move on the unsuspecting *sannyasi* and pin him to the ground, much to the amusement of the younger wrestlers and the feigned chagrin of the complaisant ascetic.

<sup>10</sup>On this point the north Indian wrestlers differ greatly from the south Indian martial artists. Where the *kalarippayattu* experts seem to use yogic theories of physical culture—breathing, stance, balance, and channeled energy—to explicate and develop their art (Zarrilli 1989:1300–1301), the wrestlers do not, perhaps to some extent because most advocates of a wrestling way of life are rural men who have had little or no formal training in classical “high culture.” More significantly, however, wrestlers regard yogic physical culture as a contrived form of self-control that emphasizes the purely metaphysical dimension of somatic consciousness. They do not make much of the common Hindu cultural distinction between the “gross body” of muscle and bone and the “subtle body” of *prana* (breath), *cakra* (centers), and *nadi* (conduits). Elements of the “subtle body” are important, but for the wrestler they do not seem to constitute a distinct set of attributes clearly articulated within his own body, maybe in part because the wrestler’s “gross body” is magnified to such an extent that it subsumes all other dimensions. However, what the wrestler refers to as his body, *sharir*, includes what in the West would be referred to as distinct mental, ideational, or psychological aspects—a fact that enables muscles to take on a clearly moral tone.

<sup>11</sup>*Yama* and *niyama* constitute the first two steps of ethical preparation in the Raja yoga tradition (Kakar 1981:21). They are rules for everyday life—nonviolence, truthfulness, continence, and the like—that lay the foundation for the six subsequent steps leading up to *samadhi*.

<sup>12</sup>This point may become clearer if we consider the role of *citta* in the yogic scheme. *Citta* is “that part of the psychic organization which represents the elemental, instinctual drives of the organism” (Kakar 1981:22). While the perfect state of *citta* is unidimensional, with “I” and “other” existing in a blissful state of balanced harmony, in most people *citta* is agitated and imbalanced. The *sannyasi*’s goal is to achieve complete self-dissolution through *samadhi* by training himself to “see through” the emotional agitation of greed, lust, hate, anger, frustration, and so forth in order to comprehend *citta* in its perfect state. To an extent, the wrestler turns this process inside out by seeking a social reconciliation of emotion through exercise and action rather than a psychic synthesis through meditation and enlightenment.

<sup>13</sup>As Zarrilli has noted, the South Asian martial art of *kalarippayattu* is integrally related to these general theories of illness and health. The practitioners of *kalarippayattu* have an extremely sophisticated understanding of the “fluid body’s” humors and saps (1989:1292–1294).

<sup>14</sup>Since many wrestlers work, the extreme ideal is rarely realized in practice. Nevertheless, some wrestlers receive a stipend of almonds and milk, and most wrestlers take responsibility for preparing their own milk-*ghi*-almond tonic.

<sup>15</sup>At issue here is the problem of establishing self-discipline as the primary referent for public morality. For the *sannyasi* the referent of abnegation is never public morality; it is purely individual self-realization. As K. P. Singh, a prominent wrestling advocate, writes, wrestlers are not the only ones who have sought to give the values and experience of renunciation a certain ethical tone:

Gandhi controlled himself, kept himself in check and was a *brahmachari*. He was a great saint and a reformist. He freed the nation. And Gandhi’s discipline of self-control was not contrived. . . . *His was the work of the world* and he would shoulder his burden of work taking only the name of God for support. Gandhi was greater than Shankaracharya. Shankaracharya advocated the complete separation of men from women, but Gandhi said that all men and women should be as brothers and sisters. . . . What an excellent method of uprooting the evil of sensuality! What a grand vision! What insight to turn sensuality into a feeling of respect and honor. We must all live in society and we must purge the evils of social life from our thoughts. . . . We must tire our bodies, focus our minds and cleanse our thoughts. We must adopt commitment and independence as our way of life. [1972:31; emphasis added]

Many wrestlers see themselves as following in Gandhi’s footsteps. His advocacy of a wholesome diet, yogic fitness, and disciplined thought complements the wrestler’s ideal of moral fitness. From this perspective, strict asceticism disconnects emotion and experience from action, since it would be logically inconsistent, in the wrestler’s estimation, for a “pure *sannyasi*”—which is to say a self-proclaimed or formally initiated one such as Shankaracharya—to engage himself in a sociopolitical cause. This, I think, is the distinction K. P. Singh is making between those who radically dissociate themselves from women in order to achieve self-control and those who redefine their social relationships with women in order to make their self-control serve a moral purpose.

<sup>16</sup>Hanuman is a popular heroic figure in the 16th-century epic *Ramacaritamansana*, by Tulsi Das. He is the dutiful and devout agent of Lord Ram, an incarnation of Vishnu. Hanuman helps Ram and Ram’s



younger brother Lakshman destroy the evil kingdom of Lanka. Elsewhere I have discussed Hanuman's role vis-à-vis wrestling in general (Alter 1989:399–435) and the wrestler's physique in particular (Alter In press b), but here I focus on his ascetic attributes.

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# TRANSSEXUALISM, GENDER, AND ANXIETY IN TRADITIONAL INDIA

ROBERT P. GOLDMAN

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

The virtually universal theme of transsexualism, the idea that a person can or should under certain circumstances change his or her original sex has had a particularly long, complex, and productive history in South Asia. From the time of the earliest known Sanskrit texts through the biographies of medieval and modern religious and political leaders, to contemporary fiction this theme has been closely connected with some of the region's most central theological, aesthetic, and social ideologies. In this study I will survey and discuss a number of salient examples of transsexualism drawn from the religious and mythological texts of ancient and medieval India. I will also discuss some significant manifestations of the theme in cultic practices at various shrines in north and south India, and in the lives and teachings of several important modern Indian religious figures and members of organized religious communities. In doing so I will propose an analysis of the theme and its role in the constructions of gender, power, and authority in a traditional patriarchal society.

In Memory of Bimal Krishna Matilal (1935–1991)

*se deśe e deśe anek antar  
jānaye sakal loke |  
se deśe e deśe miśāmiśi ache  
e kathā koya nā kāke ||*

“There is a vast difference between this world and the next.”

Every one knows that.

This world and the next are really one and the same.

But that is something you should not tell to anyone.<sup>1</sup>

THE QUESTION OF HOW A scholar “reads” or ought to “read” a text, whether it be oral, written, plastic, or performative—especially when the text is derived from a culture other than that of the scholar—has become increasingly central to a number of academic fields in recent years. Few disciplines have had to grapple with this issue more seriously than the cluster grouped uneasily under such names as “Asian” or “Oriental” studies. The question has, in fact, grown more complex in the last several decades by virtue of the introduction of theoretical and methodological approaches in both the humanities and the social sciences that specifically problematize

such reading. Workers in anthropology, history, and literary criticism have sought to demonstrate that reading a text is, among other things, a political act, especially when the reader places himself (or herself) in a position of dominance *vis à vis* the audience for which the text was intended. Scholars such as Said, Clifford, Geertz, Spivak, and others<sup>2</sup> in their own ways have contributed to the erosion of the old orientalist’s philological authority and the notion that a text could be studied and interpreted in a social and political vacuum with nothing to intervene between the author and the translator/editor and no one to contest the latter’s reading.

<sup>1</sup> Sahajiyā Vaiṣṇava song attributed to Caṇḍidās recorded as song number 84 in M. Bose, ed., *Sahajiyā Sāhitya*. Cited in Das Gupta 1969: 131–32.

<sup>2</sup> Said 1978, Clifford 1986, Geertz 1973, and Guha and Spivak 1988.

But texts too, no less than our readings and constructions of them, are themselves political in that they have both prescriptive and descriptive value for the cultures of which they are artifacts. Yet certain texts, particularly the religious, philosophical, and mythological texts—both written and performative—of traditional Asian cultures, have only occasionally been read for what they can tell us about the inner affect and power relations associated with specific cultural and social configurations. This has been particularly true in the case of traditional India where textually based scholarship has tended to concentrate on philological, theological, and philosophical analysis and has rarely shown much interest in “reading” traditional Indian texts as vital elements in the social, political, and psychological matrix of South Asian cultures.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, to the extent that we fail to examine the cultural purposes served by specific texts and their recurrent themes, the ways in which they were intended to be “read” by their original audiences, and the ways in which they have been read by successive indigenous audiences, we may—for all our philological skill and hermeneutical wit—utterly misunderstand what they are “about,” either in some probably irrecoverable intended meaning or in any of the other meanings constructed by historically particular users and consumers of these texts.<sup>4</sup>

A particularly good opportunity for an integrated study of textual materials in their social context is pre-

sented when we have, as in the case of much Indian literature, texts that are not merely ancient, but have continued to occupy a central role in the culture in a variety of forms from antiquity right down to the present. One such opportunity is presented by the themes and characters of the Sanskrit epics and major *purāṇas* which have fascinated the peoples of South Asia from the time of the late vedic bards to that of the modern television serial. A still greater opportunity is to be had when major recurrent themes of these documents are internalized and acted out for popular consumption by highly visible and influential figures in the religious, political, and artistic realms.

Themes and texts that have attained the kind of longevity and diffusion as these have are of profound significance to people among whom they are current, although it does not necessarily follow that the reasons for their significance are immediately apparent to or easily articulated either by these people or by scholars. This distance between the significance of a mythic theme in any given social or cultural context and the ability to account for it is especially great when these materials may speak, in some cases, to deeply and powerfully acculturated anxieties and fears which, by their very nature, may be difficult to confront in undisguised form. In South Asia, as in other largely patriarchal societies, these fears, which these texts may paradoxically both reinforce and partially alleviate, frequently cluster around a deeply problematized complex of issues involving the body, gender, sexuality,<sup>5</sup> power, hierarchy, and subordination.

A commonplace in the social, performative, and literary representations of these anxieties in virtually all patriarchal societies has been the expression of a highly charged and deeply ambivalent attitude towards women and women's sexuality. In many texts women are idealized as pure, spiritual, and nurturant when they are

<sup>3</sup> This has been particularly true of the majority of scholars working on the vast corpus of textual materials in Sanskrit. In recent years, however, a few Sanskritists have become interested in reexamining some important Sanskrit texts in the light of psychological, political, and feminist critiques. See, for example, Masson 1974, 1976, 1980; Pollock 1985; Sutherland 1989, 1991, 1992; and Goldman 1978, 1982, 1985, 1986, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> Before proceeding it may be appropriate to issue a sort of caveat on the subject of the “meaning” or “meanings” of a particular text, whether written, oral or performative. In what follows I shall be attempting to extract a certain thread of associated meanings from a broad and complex fabric of myth, belief, practice, and interpretation. I do not mean to suggest that all the materials with which I shall be dealing have a simple, single “meaning” that does not vary with time, place, and the shifting belief systems, symbolic universes, and power relations of their authors, purveyors, performers, and audiences. It is, finally, difficult to know, for example, how ancient Indian texts were originally understood by their various audiences. On the other hand, a certain strand of hermeneutical continuity is provided by the fact that the contemporary groups and individuals who articulate and/or perform texts of

transsexualism seem invariably to derive their sense of the phenomenon from the ancient sources which they use as sources of inspiration and validation. I am indebted to my friend and colleague Professor Sheldon I. Pollock for the probing intelligence and great learning he has brought to bear on this aspect of the study.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout this paper I have tried to maintain a distinction between the concept of “sex,” which I use—as in current practice—to refer to the biological or anatomical aspects of one's sexual persona and “gender,” which generally refers to the complex of constructions, attitudes and orientations that define one's social role as a gendered being. In many cases, especially in the texts with which I will be dealing, this distinction is significantly blurred.

de-erotized and placed in clearly defined and sexually tabooed blood relationships such as those of mother, sister, or daughter. In others, when emphasis is placed on their sexuality, they are often vilified for this aspect of their nature and condemned as temptress, seductress, or whore. Thus although women are objectified and commodified as desirable and coveted male possessions, the very sexuality for which they are so highly prized is, at the same time, represented as dangerous and destructive to men. By such projective devices, male-dominated cultures have been able to establish a univocal yet hegemonic ideology of gender. A central and defining tenet of this ideology is that sexuality itself, especially when viewed negatively, arises chiefly through the agency of women who are unregulated by the societally defined constraints of kinship. This can be seen both in the recurrent ancient Indian mythic theme of the celibate male sage who has sex with an irresistible *apsaras* and then curses her, and in the popular and even judicial attitude of the contemporary world that holds women responsible for sexual assaults visited upon them.<sup>6</sup>

One particular theme derived from this matrix of attitudes and anxieties has occupied a special role in the literature and religious life of traditional India. This is the phenomenon of transsexualism, the internalized or acted-out fantasy or desire (and, with modern surgery, the fact) of changing the sex with which one was born. This phenomenon is well attested in most cultures, and, along with the related phenomenon of transvestism, it has been the subject of many historical, statistical, cross-cultural, and psychological studies.<sup>7</sup> It has also often been featured in the various media of popular journalism.<sup>8</sup> In recent years this theme has even become a staple of mainstream Hollywood movie comedy.<sup>9</sup>

Few cultures have accorded this phenomenon so prominent a place in the realms of mythology and reli-

gion as has that of traditional India.<sup>10</sup> A study of Indian traditions of transsexualism will, I believe, provide material both for a clearer understanding of the traditional literature and culture of South Asia and for a better sense of the ways in which gender, sexuality, and power have been constructed in many patriarchal cultures, including those of the contemporary West. In the following paper, then, I will present and discuss a number of salient examples of transsexualism drawn from the religious and mythological texts of ancient and medieval India, the cultic practices at various shrines in north and south India, and the lives and teachings of several important modern Indian religious figures and members of organized religious communities.

The great preponderance of instances of transsexualism in India, as in many other cultures, involve the temporary or permanent transformation of men into

<sup>6</sup> Brownmiller 1975.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Bullough 1973, Docter 1988, Vyas and Shingala 1987, Sharma 1989, and Nanda 1990: 128–43.

<sup>8</sup> It turns up frequently both in public television documentaries and on the daytime talk shows that feature provocative topics, frequently associated with sexuality. Just recently, for example, the American public television screened a documentary on the life of an individual transsexual (“Metamorphosis: Man Into Woman,” June 26, 1991, KQED, San Francisco) while the BBC presented a film on the *hijras* of India entitled “The Third Gender” (see Prasad 1991).

<sup>9</sup> Examples of transvestism would be the films “Some Like It Hot” and “Tootsie.” Cinematic renderings of the theme of transsexualism may be seen in the more recent films “All of Me” and “Switch.”

<sup>10</sup> The phenomenon of associating God or his representatives with transsexualism is, however, not entirely unknown to other major world religions. In medieval Christianity, for example, certain abbots and other theologians expanded on references found in some of the patristic writers to develop a specific form of devotion to Jesus or God as Mother. In some cases abbots such as Bernard of Clairvaux spoke about not only God and Jesus but of other normally patriarchal figures such as Peter, Paul, Moses, and even themselves in feminine terms. See Cabussut 1949 and Bynum 1982: 110–69. A noteworthy difference between this form of divine transsexualism and the much more elaborate transformations associated with devotional Vaiṣṇavism is the almost exclusive Christian focus on the maternal aspects of divine femininity as opposed to the often heavily erotized characterization of the relationship between God and his devotee in Hinduism. In one case, the feminization of a male God serves as a metaphor for the unconditional quality of divine love. In the other, as we shall see, it is the (male) devotee—not the divinity—who is feminized so as to enable him to experience fully the erotized love of God. The metaphor here speaks to the intensity rather than the unconditionality of the emotion. An interesting index to the differing attitudes of the two cultures concerning sexuality and religion is to be found in the fact that, while the Hindu form of worship became the mainstream expression of devotionism in a number of Vaiṣṇava sectarian traditions, even the de-erotized representation of God as mother in medieval Christianity has been almost wholly suppressed and has been described by one scholar as a “devotion that makes theologians wince” (Rayez cited in Bynum 1982: 110). Other more erotized representations of the loving relationship between the worshiper and God, so as in the so-called *Brautmystik*, the nuptial bond with God, the notion of nuns being brides of Christ, and the highly erotized mysticism of Santa Teresa, generally involve no shift of natural or attributed sex or gender.

women. Moreover, the whole phenomenon appears to be deeply bound up with a patriarchal culture's ambivalent construction of women and their sexuality. It will, therefore, be useful to review briefly some of the principal normative representations of this construction as they are articulated by representatives of the various indigenous South Asian religious traditions.

Expressions of a profoundly antipathetic attitude towards women, their strength, their intelligence, their fidelity, their chastity, their capacities for independence and spiritual liberation, and their very anatomy are commonplace in many of the most influential documents of the major indigenous Indian traditions, Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, from the time of the very earliest texts of which we have knowledge.

The *R̥gveda*'s assertion of feminine inconstancy and treachery;<sup>11</sup> the early Buddhist literature's dwelling upon the Bodhisattva's revulsion at the sight of the unclothed female body;<sup>12</sup> the Buddha's reluctance and pessimism over admitting women to the *saṅgha*;<sup>13</sup> the shrill misogyny of Bhartṛhari's *subhāṣitas*;<sup>14</sup> the prolonged and bitter Jaina disputes over women's eligibility for spiritual liberation;<sup>15</sup> Manu's often-quoted rejection of female

autonomy;<sup>16</sup> Tulsī Dās's famous verse grouping women with donkeys, drums, and low-caste Hindus as entities requiring beating;<sup>17</sup> and the anthologized verse in which sexual contact with a woman is said to undermine the mental, moral, and physical well-being of men<sup>18</sup> are but a few salient examples drawn from a vast, well-known, and profoundly influential corpus of textual sources providing an elaborate and ponderous negative counterweight to the equally well-buttressed construction of women as idealized lover, wife, and mother which the tradition also articulates.<sup>19</sup>

Such texts both reflect and reinforce a set of deeply ingrained attitudes in the traditional patriarchal cultures of South Asia and indeed the cultures of many, if not most, regions. As such they are of central importance to our formation of a clear understanding of these cultures, their attitudes towards women and sexuality, and the very real consequences these attitudes continue to have for the societies that have adopted them in general, and the women of these societies in particular. They have, however, already been discussed in a number of scholarly contexts, both indological and feminist, and I do not intend to treat them in any detail here. Rather, I have alluded to them in order to provide a context in which the textual materials from ancient and modern India that I will be addressing in this paper may be situated.

These well-known passages must be kept clearly in mind because the thrust of the materials upon which I will focus may seem, in many respects, to be contradictory, even diametrically so, to the spirit that animates them. And, having presented the substance, or at any rate the outline, of some less well known textual passages that may at first reading appear to project a positive valuation of women and femininity, I shall return to the better-known passages and attempt to resolve, or at the least illuminate, this seeming contradiction. In doing so, I hope to be able to shed some additional light upon one of the sources of traditional India's characteristic configuration of attitudes concerning women, sexuality, and gender.

<sup>11</sup> *R̥gveda* 10.95.15 (hereafter cited as *RV*): *na vai straiṇāni sakhyāni santi sālāvṛkāṇāṃ hrdayāny etā*, "There can be no friendships with women for theirs are the hearts of jackals." Cf. *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* 11.5.1.9.

<sup>12</sup> Warren 1896: 60–61.

<sup>13</sup> Goldman 1991: xv. A characteristic expression of the relative moral status of the two sexes as understood by the *śramaṇa* traditions is to be found in an aside on the part of the Buddha in the course of telling the story of the Thera Soreyya. He explains that men who indulge in adultery must, after suffering in hell for hundreds of thousands of years, suffer the further indignity of a hundred successive rebirths as women. Women, on the other hand, who perform meritorious acts with the desire of escaping their feminine condition or who are utterly devoted to their husbands can, he asserts, thereby be reborn as men. See notes 46 and 89 below.

<sup>14</sup> *stanau māṃsagranthi kanakakalaśav ity upamitau mukhaṃ śleṣmāgāraṃ tad api ca śaśāṅkena tulitāṃ sravanmūtraklinnaṃ karivarakaraspardhi jaghanam aho nindyaṃ rūpaṃ kavijanaviṣeṣair gurukṛtaṃ*

*Śataktrayam* 3.21

Her breasts, two lumps of flesh, are likened to golden pitchers.

Her face, abode of phlegm, is likened to the moon.  
Her thighs, damp with trickling urine, are said to rival the trunks of the finest elephants.

Oh, what a contemptible thing to be made such a fuss over by the great poets.

<sup>15</sup> Jaini 1991.

<sup>16</sup> *Manusmṛti* 5.148.

<sup>17</sup> *Rāmcaritmānas* 5.58.6.

<sup>18</sup> *Subhāṣitaratnabhāṇḍāgāra*, no. 9, p. 348.

*darśanād dharate cittam sparśanād dharate dhṛtim mithunād dharate vīryaṃ nārī pratyakṣarākṣaṣi*

The sight of her carries off your mind, her touch your fortitude. To have sex with her is to lose your manhood. Truly, a woman is an ogres in the flesh!

<sup>19</sup> For a useful survey of the ambivalence of the traditional Indian attitude towards women as both nurturant and destructive, as beneficent mother and devouring demoness, see Kakar 1981: 79–112.



The episodes with which I will be dealing here are drawn from both ancient literary and religious documents as well as from the biographies of modern spiritual leaders and ethnographic descriptions of monastic communities; yet they have one common central theme. Unlike many of the better known passages in which the issues of sex and normative gender role are engaged, episodes such as the Sāvitṛī legend, the crisis between Daśaratha and Kaikeyī, the touching devotion of Sītā, Rāma's fateful encounter with the *rākṣasī* Śūrpaṇakhā, or Śrīkṛṣṇa's play among the *gopikās* of Vraja, these texts rarely concern themselves chiefly with the transactions, positive or negative, between members of the opposite sexes. Instead, the focal moment in the materials upon which I will concentrate involves the transformation of a person from one sex to the other through the exercise of some supernatural power or as the result of a powerful wish.

I will not attempt to provide a comprehensive treatment of all references to transgenderism and transsexualism in the vast, diverse, and copious literary, religious, and folkloric traditions of India. I will not, for example, be dealing with instances where, whether in a single life or over the course of a person's transmigrational history, a change of sex is merely an index of a change in moral stature or degree of spiritual merit, nor with those where such a transformation is deliberately undertaken on a temporary basis through the use of spells or magical articles, usually for the purpose of deception in connection with a romantic involvement. Rather, I will be concentrating on those religious, literary, and historical texts in which, I believe, this theme most powerfully illuminates the complex set of attitudes concerning sexuality, hierarchy, deference, and power relations characteristic of traditional South Asian culture and society. The majority of these episodes relate variations on the theme of the transformation of a man into a woman, although a few represent the reverse metamorphosis. And yet, although it is of frequent occurrence in significant contexts in the mythological and religious literatures of South Asia and has not seldom been remarked upon by scholars, this motif has generated little in the way of analytic or theoretical discussion to date.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The theme is an extremely common one in folkloric, religious, and literary texts from many parts of the world, and it occurs in a wide variety of such texts in South Asia. European legends and alleged case histories of sexual transformation tend to associate such change with a person's acting like or associating too intimately with members of the opposite sex or to explain the change naturalistically. For a discussion with a number of examples, see Laqueur 1990: 124–29. Perhaps the

Although tales of sexual transformation are attested from the literatures, oral and written, of many cultures, South Asia appears for some reason to have provided unusually fertile ground for texts informed by this theme.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, in several forms and contexts, the theme may be discovered in a wide variety of traditional and modern contexts of Indian cultural history. The question of such transformation and of complete or partial sexual and gender ambiguity is readily observable in a number of widely familiar manifestations such as the ubiquity of the curious *hijra* phenomenon,<sup>22</sup> the common iconographic representation of Śiva in the hermaphroditic form of Ardhanārīśvara—a representation treated quite playfully by some devotional poets,<sup>23</sup> the

most comprehensive treatment of the theme in India is that of Brown 1927. Here the theme is catalogued—in keeping with the “motif typology” of folkloric and mythic themes popular in the 1920s—according to whether the change is from male to female or female to male, whether the change is regarded as a curse or a blessing, whether it is expected or not, and according to the mechanism through which the transformation is effected. For another listing of examples of the “Change of Sex Motif” in Indian and other Oriental folklore and literature, see Penzer 1927, 7:222–33. Like Brown's, Penzer's account is basically a catalog. With the exception of a few works, such as that of O'Flaherty on the related phenomenon of androgyny (O'Flaherty 1980), scholars have made little effort to understand or explain the significance of transsexualism in India. Brown provides a perfunctory section, entitled “Origin of the Notion of Sex Change,” which, after a few sketchy allusions to *hijras*, cross-dressing to avoid superhuman malevolence, the religious practices of some Kṛṣṇa cults, and the phenomenon of hermaphroditism, concludes, somewhat lamely, “We need not press too far to find a source for the idea. From all these spheres of thought and experience fiction has taken the notion and then with a freedom that is of its very nature it has adapted the idea to its varying needs” (Brown 1927: 22–24).

<sup>21</sup> The phenomenon of transsexualism has taken on new significance in the modern world with the advent of the techniques of sex change surgery in Germany during the 1920s. Popular and psychological interest, however, received its greatest stimulus in the wake of the media coverage of the celebrated Christine Jorgensen case in 1952. For a brief discussion see Docter 1988: 7–8. Transvestism and transsexualism have thus by now a considerable bibliography in the psychological, psychoanalytic, and general literature. See Bullough 1976: 60–73, 150–60; Bullough 1977: 74–89; and Docter 1988: 39–71, 235–42.

<sup>22</sup> Nanda 1990 and Shetty 1990.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, the charming and playful literary treatment of Śiva's androgyny in verses 85 and 90 of Vidyākara's

complex and highly charged erotic devotionalism characteristic of the Bhāgavata literature and the performative traditions of the Kṛṣṇa cult,<sup>24</sup> and even the Buddhist literature.<sup>25</sup> I will return to some aspects of these figures later on, but to begin I should like to turn to some less well known but still widely disseminated legends in which we see unambiguously articulated the notion of complete and literal transsexualism.

One of the oldest such legends of which we have a record and the one most frequently recounted in the traditional literature is the tale of King Ilā.<sup>26</sup> Variants of this legend are found in both of the Sanskrit epics<sup>27</sup> and many *purāṇas*.<sup>28</sup> It is closely bound up with the ancient and widely disseminated cycle of tales centering on Ilā's son Purūravas, ancestor of the Lunar dynasty, and his ill-fated love for the *apsaras* Urvaśī.<sup>29</sup> This cycle is well established in the vedic literature, and although the episode involving Ilā's transformation is not fully developed there, it is detailed in an account quoted at length by the commentator Sāyaṇa<sup>30</sup> as providing the historical context for the birth of Purūravas. According to this version, the prince Ilā, out hunting, inadvertently enters the trysting spot of the Goddess (*devikṛīḍa*) at a moment when her husband, the Lord Śiva, is making love with her. In order to prevent any other male from seeing his wife in his embrace, the God, through his divine power, had ordained that any male entering this forbidden spot would be turned into a woman. The king undergoes a transformation into a woman, which is the source of acute shame. The woman Ilā implores the

God to reverse this transformation but is told that she must propitiate the Goddess. She throws herself upon the Mother's mercy, and the Goddess grants that Ilā will be restored to manhood at the end of six months. It is during his semester of femininity that s/he is wooed by King Budha by whom s/he is impregnated and to whom s/he bears a son, the prince Purūravas.

In the first book of the *Mahābhārata*, there is a genealogy of the Candravamśa in which we find a terse reference to the birth of Purūravas, of whom it is enigmatically stated that he was born to Ilā who was both his mother and his father.<sup>31</sup> The fact that such a startling statement goes unexplained in a text not noted for its aversion to prolixity may perhaps be seen as an indication that the poet assumed that the tale was quite familiar to his audience. A fairly elaborate version is related in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* of the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*<sup>32</sup> where the motif of the feminization of the masculine in the face of the Mother's sexuality is carried so far that, in order to please her, Śiva turns not only all other male beings in the vicinity into females but effects this regendering upon himself as well.<sup>33</sup> Here too, Ilā is represented as being both distressed by her loss of manhood and is rebuffed by the God in her request for its restoration. She once more throws herself upon the mercy of the Goddess who grants her only half her wish, so that the king is permitted to alternate between the two genders on a

anthology the *Subhāṣitaratnaśa*, translated by Ingalls (1965: 89–90).

<sup>24</sup> Hein 1972 and Hawley 1981.

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of some stories of sexual transformation in the Buddhist literature of India and China, see Brown 1927: 19–21.

<sup>26</sup> Hertel (1911: 153–86) provides an extensive treatment of the story and its numerous variants in a paper which is, in turn, discussed by Keith (1913: 412–17).

<sup>27</sup> *Rāmāyaṇa* 7.78–81 (hereafter cited as *Rām*), *Mahābhārata* 1.70.16 (hereafter, *MBh*), and *Harivaṃśa* 10.615–37. Unless otherwise indicated, *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* references are to the critical editions.

<sup>28</sup> *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 9.1, *Brahmapurāṇa* 7.1–23, *Liṅgapurāṇa* 1.65.19–32, *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* 111.8–18, *Matsyapurāṇa* 10.43–11.14, *Vāyupurāṇa* 85, and *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 4.1.7–16. For further discussion of the theme, see note 95 below and Brown 1925: 13–14.

<sup>29</sup> *RV* 10.95, *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* 11.5.1, and Kālidāsa's *Vikramorvaśīya*.

<sup>30</sup> *RV* 10.95 (vol. 4:639–40).

<sup>31</sup> *purūravās tato vidvān ilāyām samapadyata  
sā vai tasyābhavan mātā pitā ceti hi naḥ śrutam*

*MBh* 1.70.16

<sup>32</sup> *Rām* 7.78–79.

<sup>33</sup> *tasmims tu devadeveśaḥ śailarājasutām haraḥ  
ramayāmāsa durdharśaḥ sarvair anucaraiḥ saha  
kṛtvā sribhūtam ātmānam umeśo gopatidhvajaḥ  
devyāḥ priyacikīrṣuḥ sa tasmin parvatanirjhare  
ye ca tatra vanoddeśe sattvāḥ puruṣavādinaḥ  
yac ca kiṃcana tat sarvaṃ nārisamjñam babhūva ha*

*Rām* 7.78.11–13

This is, so far as I know, the only instance in the mythological literature in which a figure assumes the same sex as his or her beloved in an explicitly erotic context. Normally, one assumes the opposite sex for sexual purposes or the same sex to eliminate the suggestion of sexuality in proscribed circumstances. In the elaborate version of the tale found in the *Gautamīmāhātmya* of the *Brahmapurāṇa* (38.33–35), the Goddess, in requesting Śiva to set aside a forbidden woods, the Umāvana, for their lovemaking, specifically exempts the males of her household, Gaṇeśa, Kārttikeya, Nandin, and Śiva himself, from the effects of the spell. This, of course, mirrors the exclusion of unrelated males from the inner apartments of the women's quarters of a traditional South Asian upper-class household.

monthly basis. During her first month as a woman, she falls in love with Budha and conceives Purūravas. S/he then shifts back and forth between the genders on a monthly basis alternating accordingly between the erotic dalliance of a woman and the manly exercise of kingly duty until, having performed the Aśvamedha rite, he permanently reverts to the male sex and is thus restored to his previous state of happiness.<sup>34</sup>

An interesting variant of this motif may be found in the widely known *Mahābhārata* episode in which the virile hero Arjuna, visiting the heavenly court of his father Indra, rejects the sexual advances of the *apsaras* Urvaśi precisely because her well-known liaison with his ancestor Purūravas places her in the position of a "mother" to him.<sup>35</sup> The nymph is furious at being thus spurned and curses Arjuna to lose his manhood and become a *napuṃsaka*, a feminized transvestite of ambiguous sex and feminized gender. But, like the curse of his forefather Ila, this one too is modified so as to have its effect restricted to only a limited period. Indra intervenes on his son's behalf and sets the term of the curse at one year. It is Urvaśi's curse, thus modified by Indra, that provides the underlying explanation for the necessity of Arjuna's having to adopt the humiliating guise of the feminized transvestite Brhannaḍā during the Pāṇḍavas' year of enforced concealment at the court of Virāṭa.<sup>36</sup>

Without question the most complex and elaborate single instance of a case of sexual transformation in the

literature and one of the few significant accounts of female to male transsexualism<sup>37</sup> is the strange minisaga of Ambā, the princess of Kāśī, who, having become unmarriageable as a result of her abduction at the hands of the Bhārata prince Bhīṣma, performs fear-some penances in order to be reborn as a man so that she may kill him in retaliation.<sup>38</sup> Here too, the god Śiva intervenes, promising that Ambā shall obtain the desired transformation and be reborn as the warrior son of King Drupada. Accordingly she immolates herself with this as her final all-consuming wish.

Ambā's metamorphosis into a man, however, is not to be so easily accomplished. Drupada, the tale continues, was at this time performing austerities of his own for the more conventional purpose of obtaining a son and heir. Śiva instead grants him a daughter, in whom Ambā is reincarnated, promising that she will in the end become a man. Thus the girl is raised as a boy and the king, relying on the infallibility of the great god's promise, agrees to find a wife for her. The bride is greatly astonished—not to say dismayed—when, upon her wedding night, she discovers that her new husband is also a woman.<sup>39</sup> The bride's father threatens to kill his deceitful brother-in-law, and the girl-groom Śikhaṇḍinī, in despair, sets out to kill herself yet again.

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of regendering as a result of a sexual sin of commission or—in this case—omission, the tale of Arjuna and Urvaśi is a multifarious of the larger motif of castration as retribution for Oedipal transgressions. For a detailed analysis of this theme in the Indian epics, see Goldman 1978.

<sup>37</sup> But compare also the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*'s Sudyumna/Ila version of the Ila/Ila legend, discussed in note 95 below.

<sup>38</sup> *MBh* 5.170–93. Bhīṣma, of course, occupies a principal role in a central thematic nexus of the epic that deals with the desexualization of the son in deference to the father's sexuality. Bhīṣma indeed derives his charisma, his power, and even his defining epithet from his voluntary renunciation of sexuality, an act that, in the Jaina *Pāṇḍavapurāṇa*, is rendered as an act of literal self-castration. See Jaini 1984: 111. This theme is of enormous importance to the *Mahābhārata* poets and is one of the characteristic features of the epic narrative and of the dynasty whose history it records. Thus, in addition to Bhīṣma, many of the most important Bhārata dynasts and heroes including Ila, Yayāti, Puru, Pāṇḍu, and Arjuna are forced, either through a curse or as an act of filial devotion, to lose or suppress their virility temporarily or permanently.

<sup>39</sup> The episode is, at least in this respect, an elaborate multi-form of a common tale-type in which one of a pair of newlyweds is in fact secretly a member of the same sex as the other. Several Indian literary and folkloric variants are discussed by Brown 1927: 10–12.

<sup>34</sup> *Rām* 7.79–81. There are a number of curious elements in this version aside from Śiva's abandonment of his male form. One is its repetition of the theme—stated more explicitly in the *Mahābhārata* tale of Bhaṅgāśvana and several Jaina texts—of women as constitutionally predisposed to erotic activity and incapable of acts of fortitude. Another is the interesting application of the virtually all-purpose Aśvamedha rite to eliminate almost any undesired condition caused by some transgression. For the first point, see Carstairs 1961: 156–60; for the second, Goldman and Sutherland 1984: 298 (note 11.2).

<sup>35</sup> *MBh* 3, app. I, no. 6, ll. 125–29. Also suggested if not completely explicit here is a more immediate overdetermination of the incest taboo. For Urvaśi, as a celestial courtesan, is always available as a sexual partner of Indra, who is Arjuna's biological (*bijapati*) as opposed to legal (*kṣetrapati*) father.

<sup>36</sup> *MBh* 3, app. I, no. 6, ll. 132–35, 143–52=Citrashala Press edition 3.46. The ostensible reason, adduced by Arjuna in the *Virāṭaparvan*, is that only this disguise—with its flamboyant clothes and its multitude of wrist bangles—will enable him to conceal the bowstring scars that would otherwise reveal his identity as the mighty and unique ambidextrous archer (*savyasācin*) (*MBh* 4.2.25–26 [Citrashala ed.]). Like other legends

This time, however, she encounters a *yakṣa* who, through his superhuman powers, effects an exchange of sexes with her.<sup>40</sup> This is the origin of the “woman” warrior Śikhaṇḍin who, true to the death vow of Princess Ambā, will be the cause of Bhīṣma’s destruction. For it is s/he who will serve as a shield from whose inviolate shelter Arjuna will shoot down his unresisting “grandfather.”<sup>41</sup> This entire strange complex of episodes, a mere fragment of which I have mentioned here, has important implications for our understanding of the constitution of the primal triad of father, mother, and son in traditional India, and I have discussed this passage and its consequences in the *Mahābhārata* more fully elsewhere.<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, the story makes a sort of detour, in keeping with the tenor of the Ilā/Ilā tale, to report on the fate of the *yakṣa/yakṣī* Sthūnākarna who, by virtue of his switch with Śikhaṇḍinī, has become female. S/he is disgraced by what is regarded as a form of degradation and is cursed by his/her lord Kubera to remain female. This curse too is modified, however, to permit the recovery of his original male sex upon the death of Śikhaṇḍin.<sup>43</sup>

A somewhat more illuminating episode of sexual transformation, one that focuses more directly upon the question of sexuality than the *Mahābhārata* tale of Śikhaṇḍin, is related in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* of the same poem. Bhīṣma, responding to Yudhiṣṭhira’s question as to which sex, male or female, derives greater pleasure from the act of sexual intercourse, narrates the “ancient tale” of King Bhaṅgāśvina.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> *Yakṣas* or sometimes *rākṣasas* are often represented in Indian legend and literature as having the power to exchange their sex with people. Brown includes the tale of Śikhaṇḍin under his heading “Exchanging Sex with a Yakṣa” and cites similar stories from the *Pañcatantra* and the *Rose of Bakawali*. See Brown 1927: 14–16.

<sup>41</sup> *MBh* 6.103.75–79. The underlying “karmic” reason for Bhīṣma’s death in this peculiar fashion at the hands of his “son” is to be traced to his transgression in facing and defeating his own guru, Rāma Jāmadagnya, in their protracted battle over the fate of the same Ambā who, as Śikhaṇḍin, will be his undoing. See *MBh* 5.170–93. Arjuna, too, will pay the price of killing his guru when he must suffer death at the hands of his own son Babhravāhana at *MBh* 14.78–82. See Goldman 1978: 330–33.

<sup>42</sup> Goldman 1978: 334.

<sup>43</sup> *MBh* 5.193.40–48.

<sup>44</sup> *MBh* 13.12. The episode is, in fact, ancient in that it is a better known epic variant of the vedic tale of Ṛtuparṇa Bhaṅgāśvina, king of the Śāphālas, that is tersely narrated at *Baudhāyanaśrautasūtra* 18.13 (pp. 357–58). The older ver-

According to this story, the king who, like so many epic monarchs, is distraught over the lack of a son to succeed him, chooses, in an effort to procure an heir, one of the several remedies the texts hold forth as options,<sup>45</sup> in this case the performance of a ritual whose purpose is the propitiation of a specific divinity. He performs the Agniṣṭut rite to propitiate the god Agni. This performance, although it is effective in producing no fewer than a hundred sons for the king, has also the undesired effect of antagonizing another powerful and vengeful patriarchal figure, Indra, king of the gods. In his jealousy, Indra seeks some opportunity to punish Bhaṅgāśvina and finds one when the king, again in keeping with a common epic schema, becomes separated from his retainers and loses his way while hunting.

Exhausted, hot, and thirsty, he refreshes himself in a forest pool only to discover, to his shame and horror, upon emerging that he has become a woman.<sup>46</sup> In this so

sion is translated in Caland 1903a: 21. The role of this version as the source for the *Mahābhārata* story of Bhaṅgāśvina is discussed in Caland 1903b: 351–55. For a synopsis of the vedic version, see Brown 1927: 6–7. Brown (1927: 6) regards the Ṛtuparṇa tale as “the earliest example of Indian literature of a human being experiencing change of sex.” The two stories are quite similar in substance except that the much more concise vedic variant lacks the discussion of the intensity of the pleasure the different sexes take in intercourse that forms the frame for the epic narrative.

<sup>45</sup> Other remedies include the practice of levirate (*niyoga*) as in the case of Kalmāṣapāda (*MBh* 1.113.20–25), the performance of a specific rite to address the lack of a son (Putrakāmeṣṭi)—with or without the performance of a larger *śrauta* rite, as in the case of the Aśvamedha performed by Daśaratha (*Rām* 1.13)—or the adoption of a specific expiatory procedure as in the case of Dilīpa’s *govrata* (*Raghuvamśa* 1.74–95).

<sup>46</sup> By virtue of this detail, Brown (1927: 6–9) classifies the tale under the heading “Bathing in Enchanted Water.” He then offers some variants found in ancient and modern Hindu and Muslim texts. Allusions to this folkloric motif can be found even in contemporary Indian fiction. Thus Rushdie (1981: 195, also cf. p. 424) describes one of his supernaturally endowed “Midnight’s Children” as follows: “from Kashmir, there was a blue-eyed child of whose original sex I was never certain, since by immersing herself in water he (or she) could alter it as she (or he) pleased. Some of us called this child Narada, others Markandeya, depending on which old fairy story of sexual change we had heard.” The transsexualism of the celestial seer Nārada is well known to the *purāṇas* and indeed in most versions his transformation into a woman and subsequent reversion to manhood is accomplished through successive immersions in a body of water. At *Nārada-purāṇa* 2.87 the seer,

new and weaker form s/he is barely able to remount his horse and ride back to his capital, wondering what on earth to tell his wives, courtiers, and subjects. Once there s/he realizes the unfitness of a woman to rule and

plunging into a pool, becomes a woman named Nārādī who then experiences the bliss of erotic love with Kṛṣṇa. At *Devī-bhāgavatapurāṇa* 6.28–30 she becomes the wife of the Tāla-jaṅgha monarch, with whom she dwells for many years immersed in erotic joy and to whom she bears twenty sons. She becomes a man again only after experiencing the joys and sorrows of a wife, mother, and mother-in-law. Sidheshwar Shastri Chitrao (1964: s.v. Nārada) refers to a version of this story at *Padmapurāṇa*, *Pātālakhaṇḍa* 75. He also summarizes a version at *Brahmapurāṇa* 228 in which Nārada, having been transformed into a woman named Suśilā through the power of Viṣṇu, marries Suśarma, the king of Vidarbha. Brown fails to mention the Nārada story either under his heading, “Bathing in Enchanted Water,” or elsewhere in his article. Another interesting example of the immersion motif similarly overlooked by Brown involves not only a change of sex but of species as well. In the *prākṣipta sargas*, the interpolated chapters of the *Uttara-kāṇḍa* of the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* (crit. ed., vol. 7, appendix no. 3, lines 1–114), Rāma, saying that he knows that the monkey Rkṣarajas was the father of Vālin and Sugrīva, asks Agastya to tell him who their mother was. The sage tells him that the monkey Rkṣarajas, who was born from the tears of Brahmā, was once afflicted with thirst while roaming on the northern mountain Meru. Coming to a beautiful pool, he sees the reflection of his own face. In his monkey’s foolishness, he thinks that he has seen an enemy and jumps into the water to fight. When he emerges, he has been transformed not into a female monkey but into an extraordinarily beautiful woman. The gods Indra and Sūrya see her and are instantly infatuated. Indra, without touching her, ejaculates on her head. Sūrya does so on her neck. Since great beings like the gods are supposed to have infallibly productive semen (*amogharetas*), the woman bears two sons. Because Indra’s semen fell on her hair (*vāleṣu*), his son is called Vālin; while Sūrya’s, having fallen on the woman’s neck (*grī-vāyām*), produces a son named Sugrīva. When the sun rises on the following morning, Rkṣarajas turns back into a male monkey. Brahmā then sends him and his sons to rule over the monkeys of Kiṣkindhā. The narrative concludes by indicating that Rkṣarajas, in a somewhat different manner than Ila, Bhaṅgāśvana, and Soreyya, was both the father and mother of his sons. Although Brahmā’s role in this strange episode is implicit, the tale differs from most of the others I have seen in offering no clear explanation—whether a spell, a curse, or a boon—to explain either the central figure’s transformation to femininity or his reversion to masculinity. It is interesting to note that although Rkṣarajas appears to become physically a human female s/he seems to remain genetically a monkey, as evidenced by the nature of his/her sons. The immersion motif in another tale cen-

so confers the unambiguously phallic rod (*daṇḍa*) of sovereignty upon his one hundred sons collectively and retires to the forest to take up the life of a religious recluse. But there, like the similarly transformed Ila, s/he meets a male ascetic to whom s/he bears a second set of one hundred sons. S/he brings the second set of sons to the capital and persuades their elder brothers to share power with them. At this, Indra, perceiving that he has only increased the felicity of the man (now a woman) who had so provoked him, intervenes once more to stir up a deadly feud between the two sets of sons so that they annihilate each other. Then, taking the form of a venerable brahman, the god approaches the grieving woman to savor his triumph. He gently inquires as to the cause of her suffering and, when Bhaṅgāśvana tells him, the god reveals himself and gloats over his enemy. The woman humbly begs Indra’s pardon for an offense committed only to gain sons, and the god, relenting, grants as a boon the restoration to life of whichever set of sons s/he may choose. S/he chooses the younger group and, in response to the astonished god’s question, replies that she has done so because a mother feels greater love for her children than does a father. Indra is delighted with her answer and is moved not only to restore both groups of sons to life but to let her choose the sex in which she would like to remain. Without hesitation she chooses to remain a woman. The god is again astonished and demands an explanation. Bhaṅgāśvana explains that she prefers being female because as a woman she derives greater pleasure from sex. The god is satisfied and departs. Bhaṅgāśvana’s choice provides a unique empirically derived confirmation of the belief—found in a variety of Indian sources—that a woman’s pleasure in the sexual act is greater (usually eight times greater) than that of a man.<sup>47</sup>

Another illuminating story, and one that echoes the Bhaṅgāśvana saga’s empirical demonstration of the superiority of maternal over paternal affection, is the tale of Thera Soreyya, attributed to the Buddha in the commentary to the *Dhammapada*.<sup>48</sup> As the story begins, a prosperous young householder named Soreyya is on

tering on Viṣṇu and his *māyā* is also, according to Dange (1989: 1283), illustrated by the stories of the brahmans Kāmadama (*Brahmapurāṇa* 228.69) and Somaśarman (*Varāhapurāṇa* 125.57–88). I am unable to trace any purāṇic tales of transsexualism involving the *ṛṣi* Mārkaṇḍeya.

<sup>47</sup> *Garuḍapurāṇa* 109.33, Schmidt 1911: 132, Böhlingk 1868: 412, and Meyer 1930: 380.

<sup>48</sup> Norman 1909, *Dhammaṭṭhakathā* 3.9 (on *Dhammapada* 43). The story is translated—with subtle bowdlerization—in Burlingame 1921: 23–28. Aside from this very interesting story, with its striking affinities to the tale of Rūpama/Bhaṅgāśvana, the Buddhist literature makes only scattered reference to the change of

his way to bathe with a companion when he happens to catch sight of the Buddhist elder Mahākaccāyana, who is dressing at the bathing spot. When he sees the monk's exquisite golden body, the young man suddenly conceives the desire that the Thera might become his wife or that his actual wife might come to have a body as splendid as that of the holy man. No sooner does this illicit fantasy cross Soreyya's mind, however, than his genitalia vanish,<sup>49</sup> only to be replaced by those of a woman. Like Ila and Bhaṅgāśvana, Soreyya is said to be humiliated by this transformation, but unlike the latter, does not return home but flees without a word.

Falling in with a caravan bound for Takṣaśīla, Soreyya, now the beautiful young woman Soreyyā, becomes the lover, or perhaps wife, of a man of that city. In the course of a few years, she bears him two sons. As Soreyya was already the father of two sons in the city of Soreyya, he thus becomes, like Ila and Bhaṅgāśvana, both a mother and a father. One day Soreyyā happens to see his old friend from the city of Soreyya who, having heard the woman's strange tale, manages to bring Mahākaccāyana to her house for alms. The friend intercedes for Soreyyā, begging the monk to pardon the offense. The Elder consents and Soreyyā is instantly restored to his original sex. Taking leave of his sons, Soreyya declares his intent to quit the householder's life and is initiated into the Buddhist order under Mahākaccāyana. Now known as Thera Soreyya, he is questioned by curious townsfolk as to which pair of his sons are dearest to him and—just like Bhaṅgāśvana when questioned by Indra—he replies that he is fonder of those of whom he is the mother. Later, reflecting on the transience of existence, he attains true detachment. After that, whenever the question is repeated, he replies that he no longer retains any emotional attachment whatever.

Other traditional texts allude, sometimes elaborately, to a change of sex that a person experiences either as a fantasy or full-fledged delusion through the power of

sexual desire. The most productive source for this motif is, of course, the often repeated and embellished legend of Kṛṣṇa Gopāla, the adolescent lover of the *gopīs* of Vraja. In several versions of this story, one finds references to the love-maddened *gopīs* who, in their frenzy at being abandoned by the mischievous Kṛṣṇa, project fantasized sexual transformations upon themselves and engage in love play with one another.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, one comes across references to the *gopas*' wish to become women so that they may directly experience the *mādhuryabhāva*, or state of erotized bliss, generally regarded as the highest expression of *bhakti*. An analogous phenomenon related to this may be seen in the contemporary performance of the Rāslilā in which the adolescent boys who play the roles of the *gopīs* exaggerate the conventionally effeminate speech and gestures that their roles and assumed gender demand.<sup>51</sup> Even in the generally more straitlaced atmosphere of the Rāma cult and the general de-erotization of this *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, compared with the paradoxical mixture of chastity and unbounded sexuality in the Kṛṣṇa legend,<sup>52</sup> this theme may surface. Thus, for example, the learned Śrī Vaiṣṇava commentator Govindarāja, treating the verse from Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* in which Rāma is described as "ravishing the eyes and hearts of men through his virtues of beauty and generosity,"<sup>53</sup> explains this description as follows: "Or [it may refer to] the desire, on the part of men who see him, which takes the form of the thought, 'If I were to become a woman, I could enjoy him sexually.' This is similar to the thought expressed in the verse that runs, 'The women who watched lotus-eyed Draupadī bathing her deep loins experienced the fantasy of becoming men.'"<sup>54</sup> This theme of a change in sex, actual as well as fantasized, resulting instantaneously or in another life

sex motif. Some provocative examples are to be found in the Mahāyāna text, *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*. At one point a goddess, debating with the venerable Śāriputra the possibility of changing her female sex, actually exchanges sexes with him as part of a forensic strategy to prove that in reality there is no such thing as gender (Thurman 1976: 61–62). Later in the same text, Vimalakīrti indicates that one of the many forms adopted by *bodhisattvas* over the eons to help bring about the enlightenment and liberation of beings is that of the female prostitute in which form they use the lure of sexual desire to bring men to Buddha knowledge:

*saṃcintya gaṇikāṃ bhonte puṃsāṃ ākarṣaṇāya te  
rāgāṅkuraṃ ca saṃlobhya buddhajñāne sthāpayanti te*

(Thurman 1976: 71, 130 note 33).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. the reference to Ramakrishna in note 59 below.

<sup>50</sup> E.g., *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 10.30.

<sup>51</sup> For an account of the Rāslilā, see Hein 1972: 129–51 et passim.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. the Hindi riddle about Kṛṣṇa: *solah sahasra nārī phir bhi brahmacārī*, "He has sixteen thousand women and yet he remains celibate."

<sup>53</sup> *Rām* 2.3.12 (= Gujarati Printing Press edition 2.3.29): *rūpaudāryaguṇaiḥ puṃsāṃ dṛṣṭicittāpahāriṇam*.

<sup>54</sup> Govindarāja on *Rām* 2.3.39 = Gujarati ed.: *yadvā puṃsāṃ api rāmaṃ paśyatāṃ stribhūtvāham amum anubhaveyam ity abhilāṣo bhavati yathāhuḥ*:

*pāñcālyāḥ padmapatrākṣyāḥ  
snāyantyā jaghanam ghanam  
yāḥ striyo dṛṣṭavatyaḥ tāḥ  
pumbhāvaṃ manasā yauḥ iti*

The association of a powerful homoerotic desire with the fantasy of changing sex so as to reclassify the desire as heterosexual finds an interesting illustration in the *Dhammaṭṭhakathā*,

from powerful homoerotic desire, recurs in a number of interesting contexts in Vaiṣṇava and Buddhist texts.

The theme of a man's turning into a woman or of being both a mother and a father is not, however, restricted to myths and legends drawn from ancient sources. It occurs widely in the biographies of several modern Indian spiritual figures and in the beliefs and ritual practices of contemporary groups, ranging from the flamboyantly transsexual *hijras* to south Indian cultic priests and established north Indian monastic orders. Indeed there is also a body of evidence suggesting that this fantasy is a particularly common one among Indian men, and one that is deeply implicated in the attitudes and anxieties concerning women and sexuality that psychiatrists have found in the course of their work with Indian patients.<sup>55</sup> I shall be referring to

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where the author of the fantasy is punished by being actually transformed into a woman (Norman 1909; *Dhammaṭṭhakathā* 3.9 on *Dhammapada* 43). The story is translated in Burlingame 1921: 23–28. For further discussion of this episode, see Brown 1927: 21. For a discussion of the theme as it is raised by Govindarāja, see Sutherland 1989.

<sup>55</sup> In the course of a correspondence with Freud concerning differences Bose had perceived in the anxieties of his Indian patients concerning castration compared to those reported in the European psychoanalytic literature, Dr. Girindrashekar Bose, the founder of Indian psychoanalysis, noted, "The desire to be a female is more easily unearthed in Indian male patients than in European" (quoted in Kakar 1989: 129). This preoccupation is reported by Bose in a number of early case histories which appeared in the journal of the Indian Psychoanalytic Society, *Samiksha*. In one of these case studies, as reported by Kakar, a patient, a middle-aged man, manifests shifting sexual fantasies towards his parents, sometimes as a man and sometimes as a woman, while in another a patient frequently fantasizes the replacement of his genitals with those of a woman and ties a handkerchief over his eyes while engaged in sexual intercourse with his wife in order to make himself feel like a veiled bride (Kakar 1989: 130–31). This fantasy of being a bride is reminiscent of those reported in the cases of Ramakrishna and Schreber which are discussed below. An interesting aspect of the connection between transsexualism and a heightened eroticism is pointed out by the recurrent claim on the part of *hijra* prostitutes that men prefer them to female prostitutes. Thus Prasad quotes a married man who also keeps a *hijra* "wife" as saying, "Once you have experienced a *hijra*, all women seem insipid" (Prasad 1991: 44), and a *hijra* who says, "We *hijras* are the most popular prostitutes; we make a lot of money" (Prasad 1991: 49). This claim is also supported by some of the *hijras* quoted by Nanda (1990: 64, 75–76).

a number of instances, some well known in the West, in which this idea goes far beyond the mere suppression of male sexuality and beyond even the biophysical changes reflective of this that are, for example, traditionally numbered among the characteristic signs of a Buddha.<sup>56</sup> Two such well-known figures are Paramahansa Sri Ramakrishna, the great nineteenth-century spiritual master of Dakshineshvara in Bengal, and Paramahansa Swami Yogananda, founder of the Self Realization Fellowship and one of the first Hindu swamis to settle and establish a lasting movement in the United States.

One of the most noteworthy and often recurring themes in the various accounts of the miraculous life of Ramakrishna<sup>57</sup> is that of his constant desire to dress, behave, and experience the world as a woman. From his biographers' fond reminiscences of the young Gadadhara's pranks, such as cross-dressing to infiltrate the women's quarters in the home of a prominent villager, to their accounts of his later efforts to be alternately the mother and the "spiritual consort" of Lord Kṛṣṇa, during which he would wear women's clothes and mimic women's gestures for up to six months at a time, the theme of becoming a woman assumes tremendous importance in these accounts. Great emphasis is placed on the Master's being able to assume both genders and especially on his periodic loss of male consciousness and the difficulty of recognizing him as a man at such times even on the part of his most intimate associates. Indeed, it is argued that it was not only the outer appearance, voice, and gestures of the Master that changed when the "mood" came upon him. His biographers are fond of telling us that he underwent genuine biophysical changes during those periods and that, for example, "drops of blood oozed out from his skin from the pangs of separation from Kṛṣṇa." In some places it is even suggested that this phenomenon represented a sort of menstruation.<sup>58</sup> There is also considerable evidence that, although Ramakrishna frequently fantasized about being or becoming a woman

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<sup>56</sup> *Buddhacarita* 1.60.

<sup>57</sup> A good and detailed example is Swami Saradananda's *Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa Lilā Prasāṅga*, translated by Swami Jagadananda (1952) as *Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master*, of which, according to McDaniel (1989: 305) the original English title was *The Play of the Divine Mother as Sri Ramakrishna*. Other important sources for the life of Ramakrishna are Gupta 1980, Rolland 1960, and Mueller 1974. See also Kakar 1981: 111–12, Masson 1980: 33–50, and McDaniel 1989: 92–103.

<sup>58</sup> Saradananda 1952: 233–34, Bose 1953: 206, and McDaniel 1989: 92.

and often even appeared to lose himself in elaborate fantasies of being reborn as one of the *gopis* of Vrindavan or a brahman child-widow of Vraja who would then know only Kṛṣṇa as her lover,<sup>59</sup> he simultaneously entertained a powerfully phobic attitude towards the female body whenever it was represented as an object of male sexual interest. He is thought never to have had sexual relations with his wife, to whom he always referred as the "Holy Mother," and on occasion even the thought of touching her body was enough to cause him to faint and lapse into a trancelike state.<sup>60</sup> Once, when a prostitute was sent to him in an effort to cure what was seen as an insanity caused by sexual continence, he said that he saw the Divine Mother in the woman and that "his genitals became contracted and entered completely into his body, like the limbs of a tortoise."<sup>61</sup> Indeed, he was quite explicit about his phobic reaction to women whom he viewed as threatening, devouring, and—as this last incident suggests—castrating ogresses, the dread of whom could be allayed only by concentrating upon their maternal aspect. Mahendranath Gupta quotes him as follows:

I am very much afraid of women. When I look at one, I feel as if a tigress were coming to devour me. Besides, I find that their bodies, their limbs, and even their pores are very large. This makes me look upon them as she-monsters. I used to be much more afraid of women than I am at present. I wouldn't allow one to come near me. Now I persuade my mind in various ways to look upon women as forms of the Blissful Mother.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Saradananda 1952: 235–39 and McDaniel 1989: 97.

<sup>60</sup> Saradananda 1952: 290, 209–10.

<sup>61</sup> McDaniel 1989: 96, quoting Saradananda 1952: 172. Given traditional beliefs valorizing sexual continence as a means of avoiding what are perceived as the deleterious effects of sexual intercourse upon the health of men, this notion that Ramakrishna's "madness" is a result of chastity and can only be cured through the release of intercourse is interesting. If it has a folkloric basis, it may be akin to the ancient motif of the necessity of seducing a chaste ascetic through the use of prostitutes in order to release the pent-up waters causing drought. This motif is best and most widely known in the legend of the seduction of the virgin sage R̥ṣyaśṛṅga. On this, see Goldman and Sutherland 1984: 75–77. The idea that profound and perfect sexual abstinence itself can lead to the inversion of the male genitalia or even their conversion into breasts, in the case of great yogis, is occasionally encountered. On this, see the interesting discussion at O'Flaherty 1980: 44.

<sup>62</sup> McDaniel 1989: 99, quoting from Gupta 1980, 2:595.

On the other hand, throughout his life Ramakrishna made every effort to identify himself with women in dress, attitude, and behavior. Gupta also records the following quote:

How can a man conquer passion? He should assume the attitude of a woman. I spent many days as the handmaid of God. I dressed myself in women's clothes, put on ornaments, and covered the upper part of my body with a scarf, just like a woman. With the scarf on I used to perform the evening worship before the image. Otherwise, how could I have kept my wife with me for eight months? Both of us behaved as if we were the handmaids of the Divine Mother.<sup>63</sup>

Ramakrishna's powerfully ambivalent attitude towards women, expressed both in his phobic flight from them and in his counterphobic desire to become one, at least to the extent of a kind of protective mimicry, is in a way paradigmatic of the interplay of desire and the anxiety generated by that desire which underlies much of the mythic and cultic material under discussion.

Let me turn now to the case of Yogananda. The information we have of his life is, as in the case of Ramakrishna, largely derived from his own accounts and those of his disciples. But unlike Ramakrishna, whose autobiographical anecdotes are invariably mediated by the pen of a devotee, Yogananda's career is most fully reported in the form of an autobiography, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, a remarkable and widely influential work. Since its first appearance in 1946, the book has gone through numerous printings and may have been the most widely read introduction to Indian spiritualism among at least one generation of Americans. The book and the many strange and remarkable events it purports to chronicle provide us with considerable insight into both the formation of the spiritual personality and some of the darker aspects of the guru-disciple relationship. I will, however, confine myself to those that bear directly on the question of sexual ambiguity. From what Yogananda tells us of his childhood as Mukundlal Ghosh, we can clearly perceive his profound and vital bond to his mother, a woman whom he depicts unambiguously, very much in the manner of Ramakrishna and his wife, as identical with the Divine Mother. Upon learning by means of telepathy at the age of ten of his mother's death, he began to think about suicide and entered a state of profound depression from which he emerged only upon seeing a vision of the Divine Mother who comforted him with the

<sup>63</sup> McDaniel 1989: 99, quoting from Gupta 1980, 2:595.



revelation that his earthly mother was but a manifestation and that she had not abandoned him. It is also at this point that he resolved to abandon the world and become a yogi in the Himalayas.<sup>64</sup>

Yogananda's relationship to his father was much less close. Bhagabaticaran Ghose's children regarded him with a "certain reverential distance" and not even Yogananda's idealized and sentimental memoir quite succeeds in concealing the portrait of his father as a stern, self-righteous, miserly, and pious disciplinarian. Given this austere, distant patriarch whose attitudes towards human sexuality were such that they permitted him intercourse only once a year and then only for the purposes of procreation,<sup>65</sup> it is little wonder that young Mukundlal grew up, like Ramakrishna, obsessed with the notion of women as manifestations of the desexualized Mother, and of men as all-knowing and potentially menacing gurus. It is also not surprising that all of this was accompanied by an irresistible impulse to flee the world.

It is interesting, too, in the present connection to note that, no doubt as a result of his particular constellation of relationships and anxieties, the mature Yogananda and his disciples after him tended to resurrect and revalorize the fantasies of sexual transformation and the androgynous parent that occur so frequently in Indian myth, legend, and theology. His own father, his guru, and he himself came to be characterized in his writings and those of his disciples by a prevailing and cherished ambiguity regarding sex and gender: a belief that these men have or could somehow become women.<sup>66</sup>

To his own flock in Los Angeles, Yogananda, like his own widowed father, would become "both father and mother" not merely by virtue of a dual role nor even through a metaphor derived from his tenderness and compassion, which are frequently regarded as "womanly" characteristics. For, as in the case of Ramakrishna, the feminization of the guru was something that, at least in the eyes of his disciples, entailed

perceptible biophysical changes. Consider the way in which Yogananda's closest disciple and successor Kriyananda, born Donald Walters, repeatedly refers to his master in feminine and maternal terms. Describing the scene as Yogananda's disciples view the body of their late Master immediately following his death in Los Angeles in 1952, he remarks:

They brought Master's body to Mt. Washington and placed it lovingly on his bed. One by one we went in, weeping, and knelt by his bedside. "Mother!" cried Joseph, "Oh, Mother!" Indeed Master had been a mother to us all, and how much more than a mother.<sup>67</sup>

That this maternal quality of the Master was thought to have an actual biophysical manifestation is clear from Kriyananda's caption to an undoubtedly somewhat androgynous photographic likeness of Yogananda reproduced in the book. In it he states:

Master exemplified the androgynous balance of the perfect human being. He had the compassion and love of a mother, and the wisdom and will power of a father. In this picture we see exemplified the mother aspect of his nature.<sup>68</sup>

The notion that real, as opposed to mythological, figures can actually or symbolically change their sex is not restricted to these two purely spiritual masters. Powerful indications of it continually surface, for example, in the life and works of one of modern India's most powerfully influential figures, Mahatma Gandhi, and in those of his followers. Not only did Gandhi share many of Ramakrishna's phobic attitudes about women and his culturally normative anxiety about the negative consequences for men of engaging in sexual activity,<sup>69</sup> he clearly inspired in at least some of his followers something of the mother fixation that we see in the case of Yogananda. This is perhaps best illustrated by a memoir of one of his disciples entitled *Bapu, My Mother*.<sup>70</sup>

Gandhi's lifelong struggle with his sexuality is extremely well documented in his autobiography, as well

<sup>64</sup> Yogananda 1974: 17–18.

<sup>65</sup> Yogananda 1974: 4–8.

<sup>66</sup> Thus, for example, Yogananda, writing of his father after the death of his mother remarks, "I noticed then that his gaze often metamorphosed into my mother's" (p. 16). Elsewhere he says of him, "outwardly the grave father, inwardly he possessed the melting heart of a mother" (p. 238). The first thing his guru Sri Yukteswar promises the young Mukundlal Ghose is the unconditional love of a mother (p. 94). In writing of his own role as the founder and head of a school in Ranchi, he muses on the way in which he was the "father-mother" to his charges (pp. 255–56).

<sup>67</sup> Kriyananda 1977: 539.

<sup>68</sup> Kriyananda 1977: 313.

<sup>69</sup> Kakar 1989: 122–25. Carstairs (1961: 82–84) discusses the widespread South Asian anxiety regarding the allegedly negative consequences, spiritual and physical, of the loss of semen. For a more elaborate discussion of some common anxieties in India concerning the sexuality and sexual physiology of women, see Kakar 1981: 92–96.

<sup>70</sup> Manubehn Gandhi 1949.

as in his other copious writings and the numerous works of his biographers.<sup>71</sup> This continuing conflict culminated near the end of his life in his controversial and public “*brahmacaryaparikṣās*,” his experiments with celibacy, and was, if we are to accept the testimony of his personal secretary, Nirmal Kumar Bose, closely tied up with the spiritualized fantasy of becoming a woman. Bose writes:

In order to follow more fully the discipline known as brahmacarya, Gandhi adopted a curious mental attitude which, although rare, is one of the established modes of subordination of sex among spiritual aspirants in India. It was by becoming a woman that he tried to circumvent one of the most powerful and disturbing elements which belong to our biological existence.<sup>72</sup>

Central to Gandhi's somewhat phobic attitude toward women when they were viewed as objects of male sexuality are his complementary and overdetermined struggles to desexualize them by bringing them within the confines of the incest taboo and so to regender his male self as to obviate the possibility of heterosexual desire. Like Ramakrishna he regarded—and urged others to regard—women towards whom they might normally entertain sexual feelings as their “mother.” Thus he urged those who would write literature praising women's beauty and desirability:

I suggest that before you put your pens to paper think of women as your own mother, and I assure you the chastest of literature will flow from your pens. . . . Remember that a woman was your mother, before a woman became your wife.<sup>73</sup>

In discussing Gandhi's attitude towards women and sexuality, Kakar makes the following observation:

Whereas desexualizing, idealizing, and perceiving only the “milky” mother in the woman is one part of his defensive bulwark which helped in preserving the illusion of unity intact, the other part consists of efforts at renouncing the gift of sexual desire, abjuring his own masculinity. Here we must note that the Hindu Vaishnava culture, in which Gandhi grew up and in which he remained deeply rooted, not only provides a sanction for man's feminine strivings, but raises these strivings

to the level of a religious-spiritual quest. In devotional Vaishnavism, Lord Krishna alone is the male and all devotees, irrespective of their sex, are female. Gandhi's statement that he had mentally become a woman or that he envied women and that there is as much reason for a man to wish that he was born a woman, as for women to do otherwise, thus struck many responsive chords in his audience.<sup>74</sup>

Similarly, the transformations of sex that are associated with the legendary companions and devotees of the principal *avatāras* of Viṣṇu, particularly Kṛṣṇa and to a lesser degree Rāma, are widely known. Among the various emotive values (*bhāva*) associated with the worship of Kṛṣṇa and analogous to the various types of human affectual relationships, maternal, friendly, servile, etc., it is clear that the most powerful and heavily invested in the *bhākta* tradition is the so-called *mādhuryabhāva*, the emotive state of “sweetness,” that is, of passionate, all-consuming erotic love. Indeed this *rasa-rāja*, or “king of emotive states” as it is sometimes called, is unquestionably the driving force behind several of the various Kṛṣṇa-oriented *sampradāyas*, *mārgas*, and *panths* of the Vaiṣṇava tradition. Given the preeminence of *mādhurya* and the unambiguousness of the heterosexual erotic imagery that drives it, it follows that for a man to partake of it he must, in some sense and to some degree, “transform” himself into a woman to fully experience the love of God. Indeed, such transformation is in many cases textually mandated as necessary for the “proper attitude of the worshiper towards Kṛṣṇa” which is that of the *gopīs*. This transformation, according to Dimock, was accepted quite literally by the followers of at least the Sahajiyā tradition.<sup>75</sup> In at

<sup>74</sup> Kakar 1989: 126–27.

<sup>75</sup> Dimock 189: 158–61. Dimock quotes a Sahajiyā text, the *Vivartavilāsa* of Ākiñcanadāsa, as follows, “assume the Gopī-bhāva . . . and incessantly [let the mind] dwell upon the body of Kṛṣṇa. Each in his own way will enjoy the pleasure of coition. The Gopī-bhāva does away with maleness in sexual relationship” (pp. 158–59). He also briefly treats the Sahajiyās' theory of how such sexual transformation is possible in terms of their sense that sexuality is determined by the relative balance of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* in the individual human body (pp. 159–61). For an excellent overview of the background and doctrines of Sahajiyā Vaiṣṇavism, see Das Gupta 1969: 113–46. The use of this notion to justify the indulgence of homoerotic desire has been alleged of the controversial Anand Marg cult in India. In one rather propagandistic publication put out by the Government of India, which has proscribed the organization, it is alleged that the tendency of homosexuality

<sup>71</sup> Gandhi 1957: 28–31, 71–72, 204–11; Bose 1953: 189–207; Erikson 1969: 120–23, 402–6; and Mehta 1976: 179–213.

<sup>72</sup> Bose 1953: 1.

<sup>73</sup> Kakar (1989: 127) quoting from M. K. Gandhi, *To the Women* (Karachi: Hingorani, 1943: 102).

least one historical instance, a woman was able to use such a theologically constructed sexual transformation to break down, at least temporarily, the socially grounded taboo on certain male religious figures having contact with women. The poet-saint and Rajput princess Mīrā Bāī, whose behavior was not infrequently cause for scandal in her highly patriarchal society, is said to have once come to Vrindavan in order to meet Jīva Gosvāmī, one of the great Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* of Vrindavan. The *ācārya* was scandalized and refused her request for an audience saying that it would be highly improper for him, as a man, to meet with her as he had taken a vow never to set his eyes upon the face of a woman. Undaunted, Mīrā sent back a message stating that she had heard that Kṛṣṇa was the only male in Vrindavan. Whence, she inquired, had this second man come? The *ācārya* was shamed by this and thus had no choice but either to assent to the interview or, in essence, admit the fictive quality of the sexual and gender transformation that lies at the heart of Gauḍīya theology. The interview was granted.<sup>76</sup>

Indeed, according to some authors, the desire of the male devotee to mask or eliminate his maleness as an obstacle to union with Kṛṣṇa may go beyond emotional transformation to involve varying degrees of modification to both one's costume and even anatomy. Summa-

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on the part of its founder Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, or Ananda-murti, was "justified as being in accordance with secret 'Tantrik' practices which would spiritually elevate the disciple. The doubting disciple himself was also satisfied with the explanation that the act of homosexuality was a result of the disciple's wish in the past life to worship the 'Parama Purusa' in the form of 'Radha' and that this unfulfilled desire was acting as a barrier to his ultimate liberation" (Kishore 1976: 16). V. S. Naipaul, who had evidently heard similar rumors about the cult, has a somewhat different version. He claims that recruits to Ananda Marg desired by the leader "were persuaded that they had been girls in previous lives" (Naipaul 1976–1977: 62). If these charges are true, this would be a particularly sinister exploitation of what would then have to be seen as a widespread and deeply rooted cultural notion. Even if they are false, it is apparent that people would not contrive them unless they were sufficiently culturally syntonetic to be deemed plausible. Compare the passage cited from the *Padma-purāṇa* in note 76 where this is precisely the argument stated to explain the *gopīs*' amorous involvement with Kṛṣṇa.

<sup>76</sup> I am grateful to my colleague Professor Usha Nilsson, of the University of Wisconsin, for having called this anecdote to my attention. She informs me that the original reference is to be found in the *Bhaktirasabodhinīṭikā* on the *Bhaktamālā* of Priyadāsa. Reference to the story can also be found in Prabhat 1965: 189 and in Hawley 1987: 59.

riizing a few of these writers, Serena Nanda, in her study of the *hijras* of India, notes:

Several esoteric Hindu ritual practices involve male transvestism as a form of devotion. Among the Sakhibhava (a sect that worships Vishnu) Krishna may not be worshiped directly. The devotees in this sect worship Radha, Krishna's beloved, with the aim of becoming her attendant: It is through her, as Krishna's consort, that Krishna is indirectly worshiped. The male devotees imitate feminine behavior, including simulated menstruation; they may also engage in sexual acts with men as acts of devotion, and some devotees even castrate themselves in order to more nearly approximate a female identification with Radha.<sup>77</sup>

That this desire on the part of a man to become woman, in order to experience to the full the love of

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<sup>77</sup> Nanda 1990: 21. Nanda cites Bullough 1976: 267–68, Kakar 1981: 102–3, and Spratt 1966: 315. In some cases transsexualism may play a significant role in quite public ritual performances. Thus, for example, Shetty provides a journalistic report of the annual *thali* festival performed on the full-moon night of Caitra at the temple of Aravan at Koovagam in Tamil Nadu. According to the local legend, the Pāṇḍavas were told by Sahadeva that they could insure victory over the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra only through the immolation of a perfect male. Finding that the only three such men in their ranks were Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa, and Aravan, a son of the former, and that the first two were otherwise indispensable, they resolve to sacrifice the third. Aravan accedes but asks that he first be married. As no woman can be found who is willing to be widowed so soon, Kṛṣṇa agrees to transform himself into a woman, marry Aravan, and spend a night of marital bliss with him. When Aravan is beheaded in the morning, Kṛṣṇa spends a short time as a widow and then reverts to his male form. This festival is largely patronized by *hijras* who identify themselves with this female form of Kṛṣṇa. They are married to the deified Aravan on the eve of the festival when the priest invests them with a yellow thread (the *thali* of the ritual's name, a kind of *maṅgalasūtra*). They spend a night of wild revelry and sexual promiscuity until dawn when, being widowed through the sacrifice of Aravan, they dress in white and lament (Shetty 1990). Nanda, too, apparently refers to this festival when she describes the legend and events surrounding the ceremonial marriage of *hijras* in Tamil Nadu to the god Koothandavar, although her account appears to be somewhat garbled (Nanda 1990: 20–21). O'Flaherty (1980: 334) cites a passage from the *Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa*, a *śākta* text of Bengal, in which Śiva and Kālī incarnate themselves as Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, respectively, and so enjoy sexuality from the perspective of the opposite sex.

the Lord, arises from a powerfully homoerotic impulse is strongly suggested in many episodes, not the least of which is the Vaiṣṇava legend that the original *gopīs*, the cowherd girls of Vraja, were female reincarnations of the male sages of the Daṇḍaka Forest who, ages before, had experienced sexual desire for the exquisite body of Rāma, himself an earlier manifestation of Viṣṇu. This connection is explained as follows in a purāṇic text:

When the cowherd women saw Acuyta (Kṛṣṇa) who surpassed in beauty the curved tip of the Love God's bow, they were all smitten by the arrow of the god of desire. For long ago when the great sages dwelling in the Daṇḍaka Forest had seen Rāma, who is Hari, with his splendid body, they desired to enjoy him sexually. And later, having all been born as women in Gokula, they at last made love with Hari and thus were released from the ocean of existence.<sup>78</sup>

This assumption on the part of a man of the sexuality and gender role of a woman, either to intensify the love of a male God through the metaphor or emotional equivalent of heterosexual longing and passion or to defuse or deny any such suggestion of sexuality in the case of the female divinity, is not only undertaken by individuals but may be a group phenomenon as well. An interesting example of the latter has been observed in the activities of the subgroup of the Rāmānandi monastic order of Ayodhya whose members refer to themselves as *rasiks*. This group, also known as *sakhis* or “female companions,” organizes its communal life around a special form of temple worship and devotion to both Sītā and Rāma known as *madhuropāsana*, or “sweet worship.” But the intimate physical operations involved in the daily routine of serving the female divinity present certain problems to these monks. The social anthropologist Peter van der Veer, in his elaborate study of the Rāmānandis, describes the situation as follows:

In the common *seva* of the Ramanandis it is Ram, the Ultimate Being, who is served by the worshiper. In the

rasik tradition it is the divine couple, Ram and Sita, what they call the *yugal sarkār*, ‘the royal couple.’ The worship of Ram and Sita together creates a problem. Male sadhus cannot serve Sita; they cannot, for example, bathe her. Therefore when serving Sita they must think of themselves as women who are female friends (*sakhis*) of Sita.<sup>79</sup>

This practice is regarded as having had its precedent in the actual story of Rāma and Sītā.

According to the *rasiks* this idea originated when Ram and Sita returned from their exile to Ayodhya. Hanuman, among others, had asked to be allowed to serve not only Ram, but also Sita. They became the first *sakhis* of Sita. As *sakhis* they also got new names as follows:

| [Male]     | [Female]                  |
|------------|---------------------------|
| Hanuman    | Charushila                |
| Lakshman   | Lakshmana                 |
| Vibhishan  | Padmaganda [ <i>sic</i> ] |
| Sugriv     | Vararoha                  |
| Bharat     | Subhaga                   |
| Jambavan   | Sulocana                  |
| Shatrughna | Hema                      |
| Angada     | Kshema <sup>80</sup>      |

The provision of these very feminine names to the heroic brothers and allies of Rāma suggests that, as in the other mythological episodes discussed above, the transformation from male to female is not thought to be merely a change of mental attitude but a genuine—if not necessarily permanent—biophysical metamorphosis. This is, I think, both confirmed and replicated, in some of the more esoteric practices of the *rasiks* as reported by van der Veer. The *sādhus*, like Rama-krishna, are not averse to dressing as women and even associate themselves with the processes of the female reproductive cycle. According to van der Veer:

Nevertheless, *rasik* practices do take things rather far. The female identification of the male devotees is very strong. During the temple worship the *sadhu* puts on a female dress (*sāri*) and female ornaments. Some of the *rasiks* even wear these dresses and ornaments in public like transvestites. There are personal differences among the *rasiks* as to the extent of their identification as well as to the openness with which they behave. An esoteric feature of their life as females is that they sometimes

<sup>78</sup> *avadhīritakandarpakoṭilāvanyam acyutam  
sarvā gopastriyo dṛṣṭvā manmathāstreṇa pīḍitāḥ  
purā maharṣayaḥ sarve daṇḍakāranyavāsinaḥ  
dṛṣṭvā rāmaṁ hariṁ tatra bhoktum āicchan  
suvigraham  
te sarve strītvam āpannāḥ samudbhūtāḥ tu gokule  
hariṁ saṁprāpya kāmēna tato muktā bhavārṇavāt  
Padmapurāṇa 6.272.165–67.*

Compare the alleged exploitation of this notion on the part of the leader of the Ananda Marg, as discussed in note 73 above.

<sup>79</sup> Van der Veer 1988: 162.

<sup>80</sup> Van der Veer 1988: 162.

observe the Hindu taboos of the menstruation period. These things are never openly discussed with outsiders, so that it is hard to go deeply into these matters. The relationship between sakhis and Ram is also a matter of esoteric secrecy. Although the rasiks emphasize that they are acting as unmarried innocent girls (*mugdā*), I found that in at least some temples a part of the Hindu marriage ceremony (*karagrahan*) was performed as a rasik initiation. In this way the sadhu was symbolically "taken by the hand" by Ram who was subsequently not officially married with "her," but could enjoy "her" body. In this initiation the devotee identifies with one of the sakhis and enters into an erotic parakiya relation with Ram. These practices are, however, kept "back stage" and could only be found out with considerable difficulty. The common "front stage" view is that Ramanandi rasiks do not enjoy real erotic love for Ram, but help the divine couple to enjoy it.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Van der Veer 1988: 169. These episodes do not by any means exhaust the legends and practices involving transsexualism and transvestism that are associated with Viṣṇu and his principal incarnations. There are, for example, the well-known versions of the legend of the churning of the primal ocean in which Viṣṇu, in order to distract the *asuras* from their quest for the *amṛta*, assumes the guise of the temptress Mohini, "the Infatuator." Cf. *MBh* 1.16.40–1.17.10 and *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 1.9. Viṣṇu, both in *propria persona* and as Kṛṣṇa, is also closely involved in the tales of the transsexualism of the *ṛṣi* Nārada discussed in note 44 above. Even Kṛṣṇa's son Sāmba has a curious association with transvestism and mock transsexualism. Thus it is Sāmba who, at the beginning of the eerie and chilling *Musalaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, dresses as a pregnant woman in a bizarre effort to mock itinerant holy men. The resulting inevitable curse not only insures the destruction of the Vṛṣṇis and the Andhakas, but does so in a way that further ambiguates the question of biological sex and social gender. For as a consequence of his affront, Sāmba is made—like a real woman—to undergo an actual pregnancy and birth. Yet the product of this weird gestation is not a child but a phallic club that will be the instrument of the destruction of the Yādava clans (*MBh* 16.2–8). In an episode of the *Liṅgapurāṇa* (1.65.19–24), as cited at Dange 1989: 1282–83, such imposture results in a less ambiguous change of sex. There it is related that two friends, brahmins, attempt to take advantage of the hospitality of the Nīṣāḍha queen Simantini, whose practice it was to feed a brahman couple each day as a mode of worship of the divine couple Śiva and Pārvatī. As a consequence of this deception, the man impersonating the wife is actually transformed into a woman who then in reality marries her companion. A number of additional instances of sectarian divinities changing sex for one purpose or another are adduced in O'Flaherty 1980.

This kind of ritualized transsexualism on the part of male devotees and officiants of a divinity is not confined to the Vaiṣṇava movements of north India<sup>82</sup> but occurs in a variety of ritual contexts in the south as well. Aside from the interesting ceremony surrounding the group marriage of *hijras* along with Kṛṣṇa to the hero Aravan in Tamil Nadu described by Shetty and Nanda,<sup>83</sup> there are examples involving a variety of cults centering on shrines in various other regions of the south.

A particularly interesting cultic worship involving transsexualism in Karnataka has been described by Nicholas J. Bradford.<sup>84</sup> This is the cult of the goddess Yellamma, identified with the epic-purāṇic figure of Renukā as well as with other representations of the goddess, as she is worshiped at her shrine near the town of Saundatti in Belgaum district of northern Karnataka. According to Bradford, many men who are possessed by the goddess are thereby changed into "sacred female men" or *jōgappa*. These transgendered acolytes adopt female names, hairstyles, and dress and take on feminine occupations and modes of ornamentation.<sup>85</sup> Unlike ordinary women, but like *hijras*, they flaunt an exaggerated "female" sexuality. They also engage in both flirtation and sexual intercourse with men.<sup>86</sup> Like the transsexuals who participate in the Aravan cult of Tamil Nadu, the *jōgappa* of Karnataka are also ritually married and "widowed" at the same time as these events befall their indwelling divinity.<sup>87</sup>

Another example of such a cult, for which I am indebted to J. Richardson Freeman of Harvard University, occurs in Kerala. According to Freeman, in a recent unpublished conference paper,<sup>88</sup> and in personal correspondence, a class of low-caste priests of the *teyyam* cult, who are said in Malayalam to be *veliccappāṭu* or "illuminated," must, before entering the shrines to which they are attached, take a ritual bath and receive a ritually purified waistcloth from a low-caste washerwoman." Freeman notes that the same bath and change of waistcloth was traditionally required to purify mid-

<sup>82</sup> For a suggestive, if not very penetrating, discussion of the use of transvestites in temple ritual in Orissa and its connection with the role of the *hijra*, see Marglin 1985: 49, 51–53.

<sup>83</sup> See note 75.

<sup>84</sup> Bradford 1983: 307–22.

<sup>85</sup> Bradford 1983: 311.

<sup>86</sup> Bradford 1983: 311.

<sup>87</sup> Bradford 1983: 312–14.

<sup>88</sup> Freeman, "Sex, Death, and Social Identity in the Goddess Worship of Northern Kerala," presented at the Fifth Annual South Asian Studies Conference at the University of California at Berkeley, February 24, 1991.

dle- and high-caste women after their periods of menstrual seclusion. Indeed, he notes, the term for the change of garments in both cases, *mārru*, is most generally understood to refer to the ritual of purification after menstruation. Moreover, he adds, local people recognize that during these ceremonies the priests' dress is "more like a woman's than a man's." The priests, it should be noted, resist their identification with menstruous women, but Freeman notes that the fact of the ceremonies for the priest being carried out monthly on the Tuesdays sacred to the goddesses further suggests a convergence.

These beliefs and practices, some of which represent what van der Veer and others have called the "Krishnaization of Rambhakti," like the ancient legends and beliefs of some modern "saints" and mystics, clearly speak to the same underlying and evidently powerful fantasy. In most cases, whether mythical or associated with historical personages, transsexualism, which overwhelmingly occurs in the direction of male to female, takes place as the consequence of a desire to avoid or defuse a potential sexual liaison with a prohibited female seen as the property of a powerful and revered male and/or the desire to be passively enjoyed sexually by such a male. Thus Ila is made female because of the sages' visual transgression in casting their erotized male gaze upon the Mother Goddess engaged in the sexual act with the powerful phallic divinity Śiva. Sri Ramakrishna began playing at being female and dressing as a woman in his youth as a way of gaining sexually unthreatening access to the women's quarters of a wealthy and powerful neighbor's house. Later in life he appears to have often "become" a woman in order to indulge in romantic fantasy about Kṛṣṇa and to engage in intimate but de-erotized, and therefore not anxiety generating, contact with the Mother Goddess both in her proper representations and in the form of his own wife. A similar dual purpose can be clearly seen in the adoption of the personae of *sakhīs* on the part of the *rasik sādhus* of the Rāmānandī order. Even the feeling on the part of the disciples of Yogananda and Gandhi that their masters were in some sense their "mothers" may be viewed, in part, as a consequence of an attempt to deny the element of passive homoeroticism that informs many manifestations of the guru-disciple relationship.<sup>89</sup>

In those mythic instances in which the change of sex is the result of a curse, as in the tales of Ila, Bhaṅgāśvana, and Soreyya, it appears that we have a multiform of the sort of Indian "Oedipal" pattern that I have

treated at length elsewhere, the pattern in which a real or surrogate son is punished, typically by castration or impotence, for intruding upon the sexual life of his "father."<sup>90</sup> In all of these cases, however, the victims actually become biological females and can legitimately enjoy sexual intercourse with and even be impregnated by the kind of powerful forest sage that functions, in the more typical legends, as a standard father-surrogate.<sup>91</sup>

The saga of Ambā-Śikhāṇḍin, the major instance of female to male transsexualism, appears to be more complex in its formulation and signification than the others. For one thing, the process of transsexual metamorphosis it describes is far more complicated, gradual, and overdetermined than those recounted in the others, taking place, as it does, over the course of two lifetimes and functioning as a significant element in three complex and interconnected narratives. Moreover, the object and quality of the transformation seem somewhat different. For although Ambā's ultimate sexual transformation, like those involving religious devotees, is volitional on the part of the central figure, it has as its purpose neither the avoidance nor the facilitation of an erotic relationship. Instead, its goal is vengeance.

<sup>90</sup> Goldman 1978.

<sup>91</sup> The story of Soreyya is interesting in several respects. It clearly shows that such fantasies are not restricted to the colorful world of the Hindu epics and *purāṇas* where the miraculous and extraordinary are the norm but can be found in—and made to serve the ends of—the canonical literature of the śrāmaṇic traditions as well. Then too, the tale presents a curious variant of the theme. Here, the young man's homoerotic desire is unambiguously and directly focused upon a father figure, in this case the powerful monk Mahākaccāyana, not on the "guru's wife," a figure who could hardly appear in this particular tale. Nonetheless, the ambiguation of both gender and sexual roles is signaled by the compound nature of Soreyya's fantasy, according to which either the monk can become his wife or his wife the monk. In any case, the outcome is the same: the effective castration of the Oedipal youth and his transformation into a woman who can be possessed sexually and even impregnated by the father figure or his surrogate. Noteworthy here is the text's explicit statement that it is sexuality improperly directed toward an elder—here the effort to turn the guru into a woman—that results in the swiftness of Soreyya's punishment. For the Buddha observes that ordinary sexual transgression, for example the unlawful possession of an ordinary man's wife, results in feminization only in the distant future through reincarnation. One is reminded of the special strictures and punishments the Hindu law texts enjoin for *gurutalpagamana* as distinguished from ordinary adultery.

<sup>89</sup> Goldman 1978 and 1982.

Then too, while the cases of male to female transsexualism may involve only temporary or periodic transformation, the transformations themselves appear to be thoroughgoing and accepted as such by the associates of the central figure. In the case of Śikhaṇḍin, however, the desired acquisition of a male body is achieved, despite the ruined princess' penances and dying wish (*nidāna*), the ritual acts of her father, and the promise of Śiva, only through the intercession of a sort of *deus ex machina* in the form of the *yakṣa* Sthūṇakaraṇa and, even then, only through an exchange of genders that balances her shift to maleness with his more typical shift to femininity. The transformation is, moreover, not accepted as fully genuine; for after all, the entire narrative rationale for the episode in the central story of the *Mahābhārata* is that Bhīṣma, the great patriarch of the Kurus, will not fight with a *woman* and so submits to death at the hands of his surrogate son Arjuna rather than take up arms against Śikhaṇḍin.

Still, the issues and relationships underlying this carefully hedged and evidently more problematic female-to-male transsexualism are not entirely different from those involved with the variants of the more common type of transsexualism. At the heart of the whole elaborate episode is the traditional culture's powerful investment in the rigorous definition of gender-appropriate roles and its profound disquiet when such roles are questioned. In essence it is Bhīṣma, the archetypal renouncer of his own male sexuality in deference to that of his father,<sup>92</sup> who prevents Ambā from fulfilling her culturally determined roles as wife and mother. Only when he has abducted the princess to make her the bride of the Kaurava dynast does Bhīṣma realize that she has already been betrothed to, and so become the "used property" of, another man. Her suitability for marriage thus destroyed, he attempts to return her to her originally intended husband. But he too is forced by the patriarchal code of honor to reject her, for from his standpoint she has now been sexually "used" by the fact of her abduction. Caught in this impossible bind, the princess attempts to compel Bhīṣma himself to marry her.<sup>93</sup> But Bhīṣma too is constrained. For having made his famous vow of celibacy in deference to his father's sexuality, he is no longer able to function as a sexual being. Bhīṣma's own act of self-degendering,<sup>94</sup> then, leads inevitably to a corresponding functional degendering of Ambā that is merely actualized through her transaction with the *yakṣa*. Ambā can now no longer be

either a virgin or a wife. She has, therefore, no socially viable alternative to the death she chooses. It is this that gives rise to her strange vow to inflict upon the author of her dilemma the consequences of his theft of her womanhood.

But the result of this episode, the death that Bhīṣma must himself suffer, cannot come simply at the hands of the woman-become-warrior. Instead, it must be situated in the context of the *Mahābhārata*'s ubiquitous concern with the central but often disguised triangle of father, mother, and son. As the immediate consequence of his rejection of Ambā, Bhīṣma is forced to fight his own guru, the dreaded brahman martial arts master Rāma Jāmadagnya, in an odd reconfiguration of the Oedipal triangle in which the young girl, whose name *means* 'mother,' takes the mother's role. Although he is victorious here in the role of the defiant son, he must still pay the price. In a later reconfiguration of the primal triad he will assume the role of the father and will be slain by his "son" Arjuna hiding, as it were, behind the skirts of his "mother" Ambā in her sexually ambiguous form of Śikhaṇḍin. Arjuna, as noted above, the victim of another case of degendering in his feminized form as the transvestite Bṛhannaḍā, will later suffer a similar death at the hands of his own son Babhruvāhana only to be resurrected through the intervention of the boy's mothers, Citrāṅgadā and Ulūpi.<sup>95</sup> Throughout this complex episode and the events that both lead up to and follow from it, the themes of degendering, re-gendering, and the powerful tensions underlying the Oedipal triad are clearly foremost in the minds of the authors.

From its prevalence and broad distribution in the other epic and purāṇic episodes and accounts of the lives and practices of spiritual masters and religious communities discussed above, the fantasy of a man's becoming a woman thus appears to be of considerable significance to traditional Indian culture. In some contexts this transformation is regarded as a demeaning punishment for some kind of Oedipal transgression against a powerful and dreaded male figure, while in others it is represented as a deeply longed for metamorphosis that makes possible an erotic liaison with a powerful and desired male. In a few cases, such as that of the legendary king Bhaṅgāśvana, elements of both situations may be found.

What are we to make of this powerful and recurrent theme? What, if anything, links the vedic and epic legends of transsexual metamorphosis with the deep concern with transsexualism expressed by modern Indian

<sup>92</sup> Goldman 1978: 338–40.

<sup>93</sup> *MBh* 5.170–77.

<sup>94</sup> Jaini 1984: 111.

<sup>95</sup> *MBh* 14.78–82 and Goldman 1978: 330–33.

monks and mystics? How are we to explain this end-less fascination with the idea of a man's turning into a woman in a profoundly patriarchal culture where both literary and religious documents, as well as deeply ingrained social usage, so frequently reflect the most radical misogyny? In order to begin to answer these questions, it will be helpful to recapitulate briefly.

Clearly a number of powerful and closely interrelated concerns run through much of this material. One is the frequent portrayal, in plain or disguised form, of a man confronted with the sexual activity of a powerful couple and/or the looming presence of a dominant and potentially malevolent male. In one of the oldest surviving and most widely distributed complexes of tales animated by this theme, the story of Ilā/Ilā, there are repeated and sometimes quite explicit references to the most primal of primal scenes, the lovemaking of the parents of the entire universe.<sup>96</sup> As indicated above, the king inadvertently stumbles into the trysting spot of Śiva and Pārvatī and therefore must be punished by his "father," the rightful "owner" of the mother's body.<sup>97</sup> The nature of

<sup>96</sup> The portrayal of the divine couple, Śiva and Pārvatī, as the parents of the whole world is well established in the Indian tradition, as may be seen, for example, in Kālidāsa's homage to them in the opening stanza of his *Raghuvamśa*, as *jagataḥ pitaraḥ*, parents of the universe. The potential of this characterization for a universal involvement in a genuinely primal scene was not perceived by the authors of the ancient legends alone. Medieval authors on literary criticism, for example, raise this question in the context of their discussion of the propriety of Kālidāsa's elaborate description of the lovemaking of the divine pair in the eighth *sarga* of his *Kumārasambhava*. I have known contemporary pandits who would refuse to read this *sarga* with students on the grounds that it would be tantamount to watching the loveplay of one's own parents. For a discussion of the rhetoricians' treatment of this matter, see Masson 1971: 199–202.

<sup>97</sup> In one version of the tale, which traces the sexually transformative power of the grove to an earlier intrusion by a group of *ṛṣis*, there is explicit reference to the sight of the goddess' naked body. It is to prevent a recurrence of such an event that Śiva endows the forest with this power. In this version (*Bhāgavata-purāṇa* 9.1.13–40), as a result of an error on the part of a priest, Manu has a daughter instead of a son. The girl is called Ilā. Through a boon of Viṣṇu, she is transformed into the prince Sudyumna. One day the virile young man goes hunting and strays into the trysting grove of Śiva and Pārvatī where he is transformed into a woman and his horse, a stallion, into a mare. The purāṇic narrator, Śrī Śuka, when asked the reason for this miraculous change, explains that once some *ṛṣis*, desirous of having the *darśana* of Lord Śiva, came to that forest where they surprise the divine couple in the midst of making love and see

the goddess naked. She leaps up from Śiva's lap to cover herself with her garment. The seers retire, after witnessing the divine couple's love play, to the ashram of Nārāyaṇa, but to please his wife the Lord places the sexually transformative spell upon the woods which men then tend to avoid. Ilā falls in love with Budha and bears him the son Purūravas. Finally, she remembers her family priest, Vasiṣṭha, who takes pity on her plight and intercedes with Śiva on her behalf. The god, once propitiated, restores Sudyumna's manhood on the familiar condition that it shall alternate with womanhood on a monthly basis. The *Gautamīmāhātmya* of the *Brahmapurāṇa* (38), in providing the origin of the Ilātīrtha, gives a lengthy and complex version of the saga of Ilā/Ilā. According to this version the hapless king is deliberately led into the Umāvana by a *yakṣiṇī* who has taken the form of a deer in order to rid her husband of the powerful monarch who has been occupying his forest cave. After bearing Purūravas to Budha, Ilā unburdens herself of her secret sorrow (her loss of manhood) to her son who, along with his father, intercedes with Śiva and Pārvatī. When the divine couple is duly worshiped and propitiated, Śiva tells Ilā that she may recover her lost manhood by bathing in the Gaṅgā. She does so and thus is permanently restored to her original sex. This version is interesting in that it combines the three most common narrative motifs involving changes of sex in Indian literature: the enchanted grove, the intercession of a *yakṣa*, and the immersion in a sacred pool. Compare also the version of this story at *Matsyapurāṇa* 10.43–11.14. A quite different and somewhat enigmatic account of the transgenderism of Ilā is found at *Brahmapurāṇa* 7.1–23. There Manu, having as yet not fathered his nine sons and being desirous of obtaining one, performs an *iṣṭi*, making the offering to a portion of Mitrāvaruṇa. As in the *Gautamīmāhātmya* version (*Brahmapurāṇa* 108), the rite somehow produces a daughter instead of a son. Manu names the splendid woman Ilā and bids her follow him. Unwilling to contemplate such a violation of *dharma*, Ilā goes to the dual divinity from whose portion she was created. The gods praise her for her virtue and promise her that she will become a son of Manu's named Sudyumna who will carry on the lineage. She then bears Purūravas to Budha, subsequently turns into Sudyumna, and fathers three sons. Sudyumna does not inherit his father's kingdom, because he had been a woman, but does carry out the duties of a king in Pratiṣṭhāna. He goes to heaven, praised as one who had borne the characteristics of both a woman and a man (*stripuṃsor lakṣaṇair yutaḥ*). This version makes no reference to the enchanted grove of Umā and has none of the repeated alternation between sexes found in many of the other versions. The historical point of this episode, like the others, is that this enigmatic bi-gendered figure is the common ancestor of both the Solar Line (as the son of Manu Vaivasvata) and the Lunar Line (as the wife of Budha) of kings. A variant of this version which is largely identical in wording occurs at *Vāyupurāṇa* 85.



the crime can be judged from the form of the punishment.<sup>98</sup> Thus we can see that the visual transgression of Ila is regarded as the equivalent of actual Oedipal intercourse from the fact that his punishment, literal or functional castration, is very much the same as that meted out to Indra when he seduces the venerable Brahman sage Gautama's wife or to Pāṇḍu when he unwittingly assaults a powerful holy man engaged in the sexual possession of his wife.<sup>99</sup> In other words, the transgression in word, thought, gaze, or deed upon the sexual property of the father is inevitably punished with the destruction of that which makes the transgression possible, the transgressor's maleness.

But what we have here in the tales of Ila, Bhaṅgāśvana, Thera Soreyya, and other figures from ancient mythology and, I would argue, in the biographies of Ramakrishna, Gandhi, and Yogananda and in the behavior of the Rāmānandī *rasiks*, represents a more fully realized and somewhat less menacing response to the negative Oedipal castration anxiety that I have discussed at length in another paper.<sup>100</sup> Here—most clearly in the tale of Bhaṅgāśvana and also in the teachings of some Vaiṣṇava groups—we see an extension of the theme. For in actually *becoming* a woman, and

thereby identifying wholly with the Mother, one can fulfill a powerful fantasy of sexual possession by the very father the fear of whom lies at the root of the focal anxiety centering on one's own maleness. Bhaṅgāśvana's decision to remain a woman and his assertion of a heightened erotic pleasure in a female body can be seen—like Ramakrishna's elaborate fantasy of being the bride of Kṛṣṇa or the *rasiks'* semisecret tradition of being sexually enjoyed by Rāma—as a form of displaced homoerotic desire for a figure that is at once beloved and terrifying. Certainly this set of deeply conflicted emotions can be seen at work in Yogananda's reminiscences of his parents. This theme represents, I believe, an effort to master a powerful complex of anxieties that is generated by specific features of traditional South Asian family and social life and is heavily reinforced through the use of literary and religious texts whose contents, in the form of myths and legends structured as cautionary or exemplary tales, deeply inform the consciousness of the cultures of the region.<sup>101</sup>

Such fantasies do not, I believe, represent either a contradiction or a genuine counterforce to the prevailing misogynistic tenor of the traditional literature of the indigenous patriarchal cultures, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina, of India to which I alluded at the beginning of this paper. Rather, I would suggest, they are on one level reflexes of a carefully acculturated male dread of the autonomous power of women, especially as it is seen as a consequence of their physiology and sexuality. For along with the professed desire to be a woman and to be treated sexually as a woman comes the clearly expressed fear of erotized contact with the female body. Whether it is expressed in the clichés about the loss of physical, spiritual, and mental powers that men are said to suffer through sexual intercourse with women,<sup>102</sup> the legends about loss of manhood on the part of those who intrude upon or witness the sexual life of their elders, or the lapsing into a transic state

<sup>98</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between Oedipal crimes and the specific forms of punishments administered by curse, see Goldman 1985 and Hopkins 1932.

<sup>99</sup> Indra's punishment varies in the different versions of this widely distributed cautionary tale. In one, *Rām* 1.47.26–27, he is literally castrated by the enraged brahman; in others, he is subjected to what can only be seen as a highly exaggerated version of forced sexual transformation, in that he is given not just one set of female genitalia—like Ila or Bhaṅgāśvana—but a full one thousand of them all over his body. It is these organs that, in some versions, are turned into eyes after Indra's horrified protest and so provide an explanation for his common epithet *sahasrākṣa*, "thousand-eyed" (*MBh* 13.41). In Pāṇḍu's case, as in that of Yayāti, the castration or degendering is functional, the imposition of either impotence or a curse of death as a consequence of sex. Cf. *MBh* 1.109.25 and 1.78.30–41. The significance of this can be seen from the fact that this punishment is not merely to be adduced from myths and legends but is in fact part of the prescribed retribution for the Oedipal sin of *gurutaḥpagamana*, or adultery with the guru's wife, as set forth in the traditional law texts (*dharmaśāstra*). This sin, which is held to be as serious as killing a brahman (*brahmahatyā*), constitutes with that crime one of only four transgressions (*mahāpātaka*) regarded as virtually inexpiable. On this, see *Manusmṛti* 11.54 and Goldman 1978: 328–29.

<sup>100</sup> Goldman 1978.

<sup>101</sup> The epics, *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, are undoubtedly the most important and widely pervasive of the traditional performance media to diffuse such seminal psycho-social messages. The importance of these texts to the culture is to be seen in the constant adaptation of the tales to the regional, subcultural, and linguistic diversity of the Indian subcontinent. That they have not lost their power to fascinate and deeply move all sectors of South Asian society has recently been dramatically demonstrated by the reception of the serialized television versions of the epic stories. In some question, however, are the implications of the incapacity of the fixed videotaped versions for further adaptation.

<sup>102</sup> Carstairs 1961: 83–87, 225–26.

(*samādhi*) at the very thought of touching the female body, the fear is the same.

But what, after all, is the source of this fear? Much of the evidence of the texts we have been considering suggests that the fear of women and their sexuality is at least in part a kind of screen. No doubt the manifest content of this screen is very significant and male-dominated cultures have not scrupled to exploit it fully at the expense of women. And yet a careful study of the relevant documents of traditional Indian culture suggest that underlying the fantasized fear of harm deriving from women and sexual intercourse with them is a more deeply rooted but far less explicitly stated anxiety derived from the coercive and potentially castrative power of dominant males such as fathers, older brothers, gods, gurus, and sages. It is on this point that I would wish to extend the prevailing explanations of myths, fantasies, and acts intended to extirpate a person's maleness and assume—to a greater or lesser degree and for a greater or lesser period of time—the emotions and the physiology of a woman.

Aside from the spiritually oriented explanations of the phenomenon of transsexualism such as we have seen in the writings by and about figures like Ramakrishna, Yogananda, and Gandhi, there have been a number of efforts to provide explanations of the phenomenon in South Asia. These range from modern Hindu apologia which essentially reformulate traditionalist hermeneutics through attempts to validate what is represented as a specifically Hindu ability to tolerate ambiguities and even outright contradiction to psychoanalytic studies.<sup>103</sup> Thus Nanda, in her quite interesting study of the *hijra* community in contemporary India, puts great store in traditional India's recognition of a "third gender" as evidenced by her title, *Neither Man Nor Woman*. Thus she argues, "where Western culture strenuously attempts to resolve sexual contradictions and ambiguities, by denial or segregation, Hinduism appears to allow opposites to confront each other without resolution."<sup>104</sup> In this she follows the lead of O'Flaherty, whose 1973 work on the polar contradictions built into the representation of Śiva as both terrifyingly ascetic and boundlessly erotic similarly argues for the nonexclusivity of traditional Indian thought.<sup>105</sup>

Yet while it may be true that traditional Hindu mythological texts appear to be more tolerant of ambiguity than their Western counterparts and, although the cul-

ture has, at least since the epic period, allowed that there are three genders analogous to and homonymous with the three grammatical genders of Sanskrit,<sup>106</sup> these facts alone do not provide a very penetrating analysis, whether in the terms of the traditional culture itself, or in those of modern students of that culture, of the pervasive and deeply invested phenomenon of transsexualism that we have been examining.

Writers with a psychological or psychoanalytic bent such as Lannoy, Spratt, Carstairs, Kaker, O'Flaherty, and Nanda have been aware of traditional India's fascination with transsexualism and the shifting of gender roles and have tended to see it—no doubt correctly—as an artifact of powerful unconscious forces at work in the individual psyche. These forces, it is argued, are greatly strengthened by the patterns of mother-son interaction typical of the traditional Indian family.<sup>107</sup> The argument, most elaborately articulated by Kakar, is that the traditional family, in discouraging the overt expression of erotic love between a man and wife and in enforcing the cultural premium on bearing a son, creates a situation in which a mother's affectual and erotic energies are concentrated disproportionately upon very young male children. The powerful emotional and physical bond that this forges, it is further argued, is abruptly shattered when the child reaches the

<sup>106</sup> The grammatical genders are *pumliṅga* (masculine), *strīliṅga* (feminine), and *napuṃsakaliṅga* (neuter). The problem is how to understand the sense of *napuṃsaka* as it is applied to human beings. In the *Mahābhārata*, Arjuna, in his guise as the transvestite Brhannaḍā, is said to be experiencing the "third nature" (*trītiyā prakṛti*) *MBh* 4.2.59\* (Citrasala ed. 4.2.27). But this is in any case an imposture which appears to approximate the state of what Nanda's *hijra* informants call *zanāna*, literally "women," which in their parlance denotes anatomically normal males who dress as women and act as *hijras* (Nanda 1990: 11–12). Vātsyāyana uses the term *napuṃsaka* in his *Kāmasūtra* apparently to refer to a type of male prostitute, but he says little about the *napuṃsaka*'s dress and anatomy. Participants in the millennium-long Jaina debate over the eligibility of women for spiritual liberation introduce an interesting and quite modern construction of gender and sexuality, according to which people of any of the three sexes may possess any one of three libidinal orientations or "genders," which they designate by the term *veda*. But here too, it is not clear whether by the term *napuṃsaka*, which appears to refer to a male homosexual, also suggests emasculation, transvestism, or both. For a discussion of the Jaina construction of gender, see Jaini 1991: 11–13, 162–64.

<sup>107</sup> Carstairs 1961: 163; Kakar 1981: 79–112, 158; Nanda 1990: 34–36; O'Flaherty 1980: 280; and Sutherland 1991.

<sup>103</sup> An example is Kakar 1989: 129–40.

<sup>104</sup> Nanda 1990: 23.

<sup>105</sup> O'Flaherty 1973: 318.

age of six or seven. The child's response to what is represented as the sudden deprivation of a devouring and eroticized mother-love is, it is urged, a self-protective withdrawal reinforced by the psychic construction of women as insatiable, devouring mother figures, contact with whom drains a man of his physical and spiritual resources.<sup>108</sup> One resolution to the tension thus created between incestuous desire and fear of abandonment, this line of argument concludes, is the culturally reinforced shift, in fantasy or reality, from the male to the female or "third" genders.

This line of reasoning is doubtless based upon both observation of the acculturative and child-rearing practices of the Indian family and analysis of the relevant literary, mythological, religious, and sociological materials. Indeed it may well explain at least some aspects of the powerfully ambivalent attitude towards women expressed in the traditional literatures of India and in iconic form in such representations as the antipodal renderings of the Goddess as sometimes nurturant, beneficent, and maternal and at other times as wrathful, bloodthirsty, and terrifying. It does not however, in my opinion, fully explicate either this attitude or the fascination with and even yearning for the extirpation of maleness that we have seen expressed in the mythological literature and in the writings, teachings, and actions of some Indian religious figures. For one thing, the case studies of Bose and Kakar are, after all, case studies. That is to say that they represent in most instances the fantasies and behavior of people who feel themselves to be sufficiently out of harmony with their social and cultural milieu and are sufficiently Westernized in their thinking to present themselves to a psychoanalyst for treatment. It is risky, perhaps, to generalize from such cases, as they probably tend to represent the extremes rather than any norm of the society. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the fantasies these patients report are wholly syntonetic with those that can be adduced from the traditional literature and the lives of several of the outstanding religious figures discussed above. In my opinion, it is the omnipresent examples represented by the popular mythology and the very visible and widely known lives of saints, mystics, and others, that serve—for the vast majority of people—as the means of reinforcing the acculturation carried out in the normal, as opposed to the pathogenic, family.

It seems to me that these texts, if they are to be more fully understood, must be read in the context of the

other texts of the culture that deal with the matter of actual, symbolic, or functional emasculation. I have dealt with many of these texts elsewhere;<sup>109</sup> in them, as in many of the texts addressed in this paper, the principal anxiety expressed by the central figures is directed not principally at women at all, but rather at the menacing, implacable, and punitive representations of the father that so heavily populate the myths, legends, and literatures of traditional India. In the majority of those texts the woman, in the role of actual or symbolic mother and the focus of the possessive erotic energies of both father and son, becomes objectified as the prize in an endlessly repeated contest that the son can win only at the price of his sexuality.<sup>110</sup> The only alternative the traditional culture holds out in such cases to castration at the hands of the father is a kind of voluntary preemptive castration or renunciation of sexuality, such as is represented in the well-known *Mahābhārata* legends of Bhīṣma and Puru.<sup>111</sup> This act of degendering serves to eliminate the sexual conflict inherent in the Oedipal drama by removing the mother/woman as an object of sexual desire while pacifying the father. In this way one is able to retain the de-erotized love of the former and the newly re-erotized love of the latter. One strategy for accomplishing this is to renounce sexuality entirely, a project facilitated by a carefully cultivated gynophobia with its negative obsessive focus on the female body and its reproductive functions. Another is to cultivate a familial regard for all women, to view them all as sisters and mothers, and so invoke the aid of the powerful incest taboo. A third strategy is to abandon male sexuality and gender entirely and "become" a woman either in emotional/libidinal terms alone or more completely through the outward appearance of a transvestite or the more profound physical metamorphosis of a *hijra* or true transsexual. With this last strategy, the emotional resolution of the conflict would appear to be most thorough, for along with the retention of the mother's love, the transsexual can now become, in fantasy or reality, the passive recipient of the now heavily eroticized love of the "father."<sup>112</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Goldman 1978.

<sup>110</sup> Paradigmatic here would be the frequently occurring cautionary tale of the castration of Indra, king of the gods, through the curse of a cuckolded father figure, the *ṛṣi* Gautama. See Goldman 1978: 360–61 and *Rām* 1.49.19–34.

<sup>111</sup> Goldman 1978: 338–39; *MBh* 1.94.86–88, 90; and *MBh* 1.79.27–29.

<sup>112</sup> It is thus that we may understand the powerful fantasy, so frequently elaborated in the various Vaiṣṇava contexts discussed above, of the devotee being "enjoyed" by the God.

<sup>108</sup> Kakar 1981: 79–90 and Carstairs 1961: 158–61. See also note 112 below.

In short, I believe that much of the fascination with becoming a woman that we find in the Indian tradition, as well as the seemingly contradictory misogyny that is another of its recurrent features, proceeds not from a primary anxiety about women but rather from a deep and, in many cases, well-founded anxiety about men in the form of culturally validated authority figures. Although it is abundantly clear that a variety of voices from the “great” and “little” traditions genuinely inculcate and seek to bolster the phobic attitude towards women as sexual beings and towards heterosexual intercourse in general,<sup>113</sup> it would appear that here, as elsewhere, both the indigenous tradition and contemporary psychoanalytic scholarship have tended to “blame the victim” in portraying women—whether constructed as the sexually voracious *apasaras/rākṣasī* or the “devouring mother”—as somehow responsible for what Kakar has so aptly termed a “vicious circle” that leads eventually to “adult men who fear the sexuality of mature women.”<sup>114</sup> In a real sense, South Asian women have been casualties, caught in the middle of a male power struggle, a struggle whose real issues are only rarely fully articulated and are generally camouflaged by a screen made up of profuse and varied pronouncements and “speculations” on the biological, intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacities of women.<sup>115</sup>

It is in this sense that women often function as pawns in an occult male game that in the end emerges

from a thoughtful reading of the tales and practices of transsexualism that I have discussed above. Many of these texts—the legends of the popular epics and the word and actions of monks and spiritual masters—provide important keys to an understanding of the cultural, psychological, social, and ultimately political transactions that lie at the heart of all forms of human intercourse, in India as elsewhere.

The kinds of myths, legends, and fantasies cited in this paper, and the social, psychological, and political realities of which they are expressions are by no means restricted to South Asia. The simultaneous disempowerment of women and the construction of them as agents rather than victims of such disempowerment is an unpleasant feature of most of the societies and cultures—ancient and modern—of which we have knowledge. Innumerable examples of this can be adduced from European, East Asian, Islamic, and other traditions. Let me offer, however, only one instructive parallel from the literature of modern Europe in which the overwhelming anxieties generated by a truly terrifying father led his son to the creation of powerful myths and fantasies centering around his being transformed into a woman for the sexual use of God.

The bizarre, fantasy-filled memoirs of the German Jurist Dr. Paul Daniel Schreber,<sup>116</sup> analyzed by Freud in his “A Case of Dementia Paranoides,”<sup>117</sup> presents a strange and moving example of a combination of transsexual fantasy and religious fervor strongly reminiscent of the case of Ramakrishna. Dr. Schreber, whose central fantasy was that he was, as part of the divine plan, being turned into a woman by and for the enjoyment of God, can now be more clearly analyzed in the light of information that has become known since the publication of Freud’s paper. For it is now clear that Schreber’s paranoid delusions were rooted in at least two elements of reality. First, we now know that Schreber’s father, the great nineteenth-century authority on child pedagogy, had subjected his son to an especially oppressive version of the cruel and obsessive discipline he preached.<sup>118</sup> Second, it has been revealed that Schreber’s psychiatrist, Dr. P. E. Flechsig, who was in charge of his treatment and of the asylum in which he was confined, the very person whom Schreber, in his delusion, regarded as the agent whereby his transformation into a woman was to be effected, was among those medical authorities of his era who advocated and

<sup>113</sup> Carstairs 1961: 72–74, 83–88, 117, 167–68, 237, and 314.

<sup>114</sup> Kakar 1981: 95.

<sup>115</sup> Examples of the tendency to blame the victim of this male power struggle or to use women as a cover for it are not difficult to find in the literatures of India. The classic formulation of the theme would be, of course, the heartless treatment of both Draupadī and Sitā in the national epics and their innumerable rerenderings. More specific would be the recurrent theme in which a woman, often an *apsaras*, ordered by Indra to seduce a holy man and so prevent him from acquiring through his asceticism power greater than that of the god himself, is cursed by the sage. Cf. the story of the *apsaras* Rambhā as told at *Rām* 1.62–63. The use of women as a screen for a power struggle between males is perhaps best illustrated by the bitter and prolonged dispute between the two major Jaina sects over the capacity of women to attain spiritual liberation. Although the impassioned rhetoric of this debate focuses upon the alleged capacities and incapacities of women, it would appear, as I have suggested elsewhere (Goldman 1991: xx), that what is really at stake is the Digambara claim that Śvetāmbara monks, who like Digambara “nuns” must remain clothed, are for that very reason ineligible for spiritual liberation.

<sup>116</sup> Schreber 1955.

<sup>117</sup> Freud 1958.

<sup>118</sup> Masson (unpublished) “Schreber and Freud,” Schatzman 1973, and Israëls 1989.

even practiced both castration and extirpation of the ovaries on those patients—male and female respectively—whose sexuality and general behavior they saw as transgressing societal norms.<sup>119</sup> Here we have—through the unusual coincidence of the father's systematization and publication of his rigid and obsessional beliefs about child rearing and the son's insistence on publishing the

<sup>119</sup> That Flechsig actually advocated and even practiced what he called "castration," at least in the case of female patients, is clear from one of his own articles, "Zur gynaekologischen Behandlung der Hysterie" (On the gynecological treatment of hysteria), published in *Neurologisches Centralblatt* 1884, 3:457–69 and quoted in Niederland 1968. Further, in an autobiographical essay (P. Flechsig, *Meine myelogenetische Hirnlehre [mit biographischer Einleitung]* [Berlin: Verlag von Julius Springer, 1927]) quoted in Masson's unpublished piece, Flechsig returns to a discussion of the outcomes of this procedure in various kinds of cases. For all references concerning Schreber and his father, I am indebted to the scholarship and unstinting generosity of Dr. Jeffrey Masson.

memoir of his delusional illness—an all but unique opportunity to see how the unmanageable anxieties generated by the unhappy combination of two repressive and tyrannical patriarchal figures, a disempowering father and a literally castrative doctor-keeper, are partially alleviated through the creation of an elaborate system of myth and religion whose focus is the transformation of the subject into a woman who will then be sexually enjoyed by the supreme patriarch, God.

Whether in the East or the West, there can be few paranoid fantasies that are not grounded in some real and painful reality to the identification of which they are the occult signposts. The myth or fantasy of a man's being turned into a woman for the sexual enjoyment of some more powerful male which has persisted in many forms for at least two-and-a-half millennia is unlikely to be an exception. The investigation of the complex nature of the reality that has animated this particular fantasy for so long both in literature and in the lives of historical figures of unusual prominence unquestionably merits the collaborative attention of scholars in both the social sciences and the humanities.

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The Power of the Impure: Transgression, Violence and Secrecy in Bengali Śākta Tantra and Modern Western Magic

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THE POWER OF THE IMPURE:  
TRANSGRESSION, VIOLENCE AND SECRECY IN BENGALI  
ŚĀKTA TANTRA AND MODERN WESTERN MAGIC

HUGH B. URBAN

*Summary*

Since their first encounter with the complex body of texts and traditions called “Tantras,” Western scholars have been simultaneously repulsed and horrified, yet also tantalized and titillated by the deliberate use of normally impure and defiling substances in Tantric practice. Yet, with a few exceptions, they have made little headway in interpreting the deeper religious and social role of impurity, either in Tantric ritual or in the history of religions generally. This paper compares the role of ritual impurity and transgression in two very different traditions, widely separated both historically and geographically: the Śākta school of Tantra in Bengal (focusing on the 16th century *brāhmaṇ*, Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīśa) and modern Western magic (focusing on Aleister Crowley and the Ordo Templi Orientis). Specifically, I look closely at the manipulation of impure bodily substances — such as blood, semen and vaginal fluids — in sexual rituals and animal sacrifice. By playing off of these two examples in a kind of metaphoric juxtaposition, I hope to shed some new light on the role of impurity, transgression and secrecy in both cases and also in the comparative study of religion as a whole. Adapting some insights from Georges Bataille and Michel Foucault, I argue that the ritual use of impurity has much larger social and political implications, as a means of harnessing the tremendous power that flows through the physical universe, the human body and the social body alike.

He who is hesitant in the drinking [of wine] or is disgusted by semen and menstrual blood is mistaken about what is [in fact] pure and undefiled; thus he fears committing a sin in the act of sexual union. He should be dismissed — for how can he worship the Goddess. . . ?

Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīśa, *Bṛhat-Tantrasāra*<sup>1</sup> (BTS 697)

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<sup>1</sup> Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīśa, *Bṛhat-Tantrasāra*, ed. Śrī Rasikamohana Caṭṭopādhyāya (Calcutta: Navabhārata Publishers 1996), 697. This text will hereafter be referred to as BTS.

Transgression opens onto a scintillating and constantly affirmed world ... without the serpentine 'no' that bites into fruits and lodges contradictions at their core. It is the solar inversion of the satanic denial ... [I]t opens the place where the divine functions.

Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression"<sup>2</sup>

In this article I would like to address two basic questions. The first is the role of impurity and transgression in religious rituals — that is, the use of substances that are normally prohibited and considered polluting by conventional social and religious standards.<sup>3</sup> And the second is the role of comparison in the academic study of religion — that is, the juxtaposition of two or more phenomena in order to generate new insights and to re-configure our way of seeing the world, which is, I think, one of the things that characterizes what we as historians of religions do.

Specifically, I want to focus on the role of impurity in the ritual traditions of Hindu Śākta Tantra and modern Western magic. Since their first encounters with Indian religions in the 18th and 19th centuries, Western scholars have been simultaneously fascinated and repulsed by the tradition of Tantra. A form or religious practice infamous for its deliberate use of impure substance and transgressive rituals, Tantra has long been for Western readers a source of both moral repugnance and tantalizing allure. In most early Orientalist scholarship and Christian missionary works, Tantra was regularly

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<sup>2</sup> M. Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," in *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette, New York: Routledge, 62.

<sup>3</sup> For a good overview of the role of transgression in religion, see Michael Taussig, "Transgression," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998, 349–364. The more important works on the topic include: Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, New York: Zone 1988; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* London: Routledge 1966; Roger Callois, *L'Homme et le sacré*, Paris: Gallimard 1950; Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, Bloomington: University of Indiana Press 1984; Max Gluckman, "The License in Ritual," in his *Custom and Conflict in Africa*, Oxford: Blackwell 1960; Peter Stallybrass and F.J. Gillen, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1986.

attacked as the worst confusion of sensuality and religion, and thus as the clearest symptom of the degeneration of Hinduism in modern times. It is "Hinduism arrived at its last and worst stage of medieval development," as Sir Monier-Williams put it.<sup>4</sup> Yet rather remarkably, in most of the contemporary popular literature, Tantra is now praised as a joyous celebration of the sensual body, offering a much-needed liberation of the body and sexuality. For most American readers today, Tantra is commonly defined simply as "spiritual sex," or the use of sexual pleasure as a means to religious experience, and has as such been celebrated as a wonderfully transgressive spiritual path for a repressive Western society.<sup>5</sup>

And yet, as André Padoux has pointed out, the category of Tantra — imagined as a singular, unified, coherent tradition — is itself a relatively recent creation. It is, in fact, largely the production of Western scholars of the 19th century, who lumped together a wide array of diverse texts, traditions, and practices under the generic "ism" of Tantrism. And surely the equation of Tantra with "spiritual sex" is a very recent invention.<sup>6</sup>

So how, then, did Tantra come to be defined primarily as "spiritual sex" in the Western imagination? And why is it that Tantra has now become so popular in contemporary America, both in academic

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<sup>4</sup> M. Monier-Williams, *Hinduism*, London: SPCK 1894, 122–123.

<sup>5</sup> On contemporary Western appropriations of Tantra, see Urban, "The Cult of Ecstasy: Tantrism, the New Age and the Spiritual Logic of Late Capitalism," *History of Religions* 39 (2000) 268–304.

<sup>6</sup> "An objective assessment of Tantrism is not easy, for the subject is controversial and perplexing. Not only do . . . theorists give different definitions of Tantrism, but its very existence has sometimes been denied. . . . But it so happened that it was in texts known as *tantras* that Western scholars first described doctrines and practices different from those of Brahmanism . . . so the Western experts adopted the word Tantrism for that particular, and for them, repulsive aspect of Indian religion" (Padoux, "Tantrism, an Overview," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, New York: MacMillan 1986, 14:271–272). For a detailed discussion of Western views of Tantra, see Urban, "The Extreme Orient: The Construction of 'Tantrism' as a Category in the Orientalist Imagination," *Religion* 29 (1999) 123–146.

discourse and in popular culture? Indeed, not only has Tantra become one of the fastest growing trends in South Asian studies, but it now also saturates popular culture and new age spirituality, so that we now find pop-stars like Sting practicing Tantric sex and claiming to achieve five hour long orgasms. One need only browse the shelves of any book store or surf the internet to find entire lines of books, videos and other “ceremonial sensual merchandise,” bearing titles like “Tantric sex for Couples” and the “Multi-Orgasmic Man.” Is all this simply a case of cross-cultural voyeurism? Or are we in fact caught up in networks of neo-colonial or neo-imperialist exchange, the ultimate impact of which we have not yet even begun to fathom?<sup>7</sup>

That brings me to the second thing I wish to examine here, the problem of comparison and cross-cultural dialogue. Comparison, it seems, has become something that is often talked about but rarely done in the academic study of religion. Indeed, scholars of religions often seem to be so wary of the darker political implications of comparison, its ties to colonialism, fascism and other errors of our forefathers, that we often feel too terrified to step outside our narrow areas of historical specialization.<sup>8</sup> However, as Jonathan Z. Smith reminds us, we really cannot avoid doing comparison; it is a basic part of the way the human mind works, how we make sense of otherness and difference, including how

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<sup>7</sup> This question is the starting point for my new book, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics and Power in the Study of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming 2003). There is an endless array of such popular Tantric books and videos; see for example Nik Douglas, *Spiritual Sex: Secrets of Tantra from the Ice Age to the New Millennium*, New York: Pocket Books 1997, which includes an appendix with over 20 pages of Tantric web-sites on the Internet.

<sup>8</sup> For discussions of the problems and promise of comparison, see Kimberly C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray, *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2000); Hugh B. Urban, “Making a Place to Take a Stand: Jonathan Z. Smith and the Politics and Poetics of Comparison,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 12 (2000) 339–378.

we understand other religions.<sup>9</sup> So we might as well get on about doing it well and in an ethically responsible, politically self-conscious way.

Here I would follow the lead of Wendy Doniger, who suggests that comparison is perhaps best done not from the “top down” as a search for transcendent archetypes or universal patterns, in the style of Mircea Eliade; rather, it is more useful to begin from the bottom up, as it were, with more mundane physical things like the human body, food or sexuality.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the point of a good comparison is not to uncover some transcendent identity or hidden archetype connecting two phenomena; rather, comparison is better used like a good metaphor. As Smith puts it, comparison does not tell us “how things are,” but instead, like a metaphor, tells us how things might be *re-visioned* or *re-described*.<sup>11</sup> It is thus a tool or heuristic device that we use to shed light on particular theoretical problems in our academic imagining of religion.

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<sup>9</sup> “That comparison has at times led us astray there can be no doubt; that comparison remains the method of scholarship is likewise beyond question” (Smith, *Map is not Territory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1978, 240–241).

<sup>10</sup> As Doniger argues, “The great universalist theories were constructed from the top down: that is, they assumed certain continuities based about broad concepts such as . . . a High God or an Oedipal complex. . . . The method I am advocating is, by contrast, constructed from the bottom up. It assumes certain continuities not about overarching human universals but about particular narrative details concerning the body, sexual desire, procreation . . . and death, details which . . . are at least *less* culturally mediated than the broader conceptual categories of the universalists” (*The Implied Spider: Politics & Theology in Myth*, New York: Columbia University Press 1998, 59).

<sup>11</sup> “Comparison does not tell us how things ‘are’ . . . Like models and metaphors, comparison tells us how things might be ‘redescribed’ in Max Black’s term. . . . A comparison is a disciplined exaggeration in the service of knowledge. . . . Comparison provides the means by which we ‘revision’ phenomena as our data . . . to solve *our* theoretical problems” (*Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1990, 52). See also Fitz John Porter Poole, “Metaphors and Maps: Towards Comparison in the Anthropology of Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54 (1986) 411–457; Urban, “Making a Place to Take a Stand,” 339–378.

So what I would like to do in this essay is to undertake a metaphoric comparison of my own, by juxtaposing two traditions that would seem on the surface to be quite radically different and widely separated both historically and geographically. I will begin with a discussion of Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīśa, one of the most influential later Tantric authors, who lived and wrote in the 16th century Bengal. Here I will focus primarily on his esoteric ritual practices, and specifically, his use of transgressive bodily substances such as blood, semen and menstrual fluid. I will then use that as a metaphoric foil to shed light on the practices of one of the 20th century's most infamous and controversial figures: Aleister Crowley. Known in the popular press as the "Great Beast" and the "wickedest man in the world," Crowley was also one of the most important figures in the transmission of Tantra to the West. To conclude, I will suggest that this comparison sheds important light on the larger questions of secrecy and transgression in religion generally. Adapting some insights from Georges Bataille and Michel Foucault, I will examine the role of transgression as a means of unleashing and harnessing an awesome source of power that lies within the physical cosmos, the human body and the social order alike. More important, however, I will also argue that transgression also operates in very different ways in these two cases; for the "power of the impure" always functions differently in relation to specific historical contests and political interests. Finally, I will suggest that this comparison also sheds some revealing light onto our own contemporary obsessions with sex, secrecy and transgression in late capitalist consumer society at the turn of the millennium.

*I. The "Conservative Character" of Tantra: Impurity, Transgression and Sacrifice in Bengali Śākta Tantra*

O Mother! at your holy lotus feet I pray that I have not transgressed all the Veda and Artha Śāstras and destroyed your worship; with this fear, I have revealed the meaning of many profound matters. Please forgive me for whatever sins I have incurred by revealing these secret things. . . . Forgive me, for, with an ignorant heart, I have revealed the most secret things of your Tantra.

Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīśa, *Bṛhat-Tantrasāra* (BTS 722)

O Devī, this *Kula-dharma* must always and in all places be carefully kept secret, like the child born of one's mother's paramour.

*Kulārṇava Tantra*<sup>12</sup>

The large body of diverse texts and traditions known as “Tantra” have long had a rather scandalous and controversial reputation in both the Indian and Western imaginations. Infamous for its use of normally prohibited substances like meat and wine and its explicit violation of class laws, Tantra has been alternately condemned and celebrated; once attacked by Christian missionaries and Hindu reformers as “an array of magic rites drawn from the most ignorant and stupid classes,”<sup>13</sup> Tantra has in our own generation been praised as “a cult of ecstasy, focused on a vision of cosmic sexuality.”<sup>14</sup> Although it has been defined in many different ways, Tantra centers in large part around the concept of *śakti* — power or energy, in all its many forms. *Śakti* is the power that creates, sustains and destroys the entire universe, but it is also the power that flows through the social and political world, as well. Tantric ritual seeks to harness and exploit this power, both as a mean to spiritual liberation and as a means to this-worldly benefits, such as wealth, fame and supernatural abilities. As Douglas Brooks summarizes, “The Tāntrika conceives of the world as power. The world is nothing but power to be harnessed.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Kulārṇava Tantra*, ed. Arthur Avalon, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas 1965, XI.84.

<sup>13</sup> J.N. Farquhar, *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1920, 200.

<sup>14</sup> Philip Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, Greenwich: New York Graphics Society 1973, 9; cf. Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, New York: Meridian Books 1956, 576. As Pratapaditya Pal observes, “We . . . have gone from one extreme to the other. While early scholars were unnecessarily apologetic about some of the sexual . . . practices of Tantra, modern scholars revel in the sexual aspects” (*Hindu Religion and Iconology According to the Tantrasāra*, Los Angeles: Vichitra Press 1981, vi).

<sup>15</sup> Douglas Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Śrīvidyā Śākta Tantrism in South India*, Albany: SUNY 1992, xix. See also Hugh B. Urban, “The Path of Power: Impurity, Kingship and Sacrifice in Assamese Tantra,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69 (2001) 777–816; Alexis Sanderson, “Purity and Power among the Brahmins of Kashmir,” in *The Category of the Person*:



One of the most important later figures in the later consolidation and systematization of Tantra was the 16th century *brāhmaṇ* from Bengal, Mahāmahopādhyāya Śrī Kṛṣṇānanda Vāgīśa Bhaṭṭācārya, better known simply as Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīśa.<sup>16</sup> Kṛṣṇānanda is most famous as the author of the one of the largest and most important compendiums of Tantric practice entitled the *Bṛhat Tantrasāra*, or the “Great Essence of the Tantras” (hereafter BTS), which is still today one of the most widely used texts for Hindu ritual and iconography.<sup>17</sup> Despite its importance, this Sanskrit text has never been translated into any Western language — though this is perhaps due to the fact that it consists of over 700 pages of highly technical ritual details.

The social and religious context of 16th century Bengal was a shifting, rather volatile one, and in fact, a period that was not entirely favorable to Hindu *brāhmaṇ*s like Kṛṣṇānanda. Indeed, as the Bengali historian M.R. Tarafdar puts it, “Brahmanism was passing through a

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*Anthropological and Philosophical Perspectives*, eds. M. Carrithers, S. Collins, and S. Lukes, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985.

<sup>16</sup> On Kṛṣṇānanda’s importance as an authority on ritual and iconography, see Chintaharan Chakravarti, *The Tantras: Studies in their Religion and Influence*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak 1963, 66–67. There is at present some debate over the precise dates of Kṛṣṇānanda’s life, some identifying him as a contemporary of Śrī Caitanya (d. 1533), some placing him in the first half of the 16th century and others putting him in the latter part of that century; however, the most common opinion is that the *Bṛhat-Tantrasāra* was composed sometime between 1585 and 1600. See S.C. Banerji, *Tantra in Bengal: A Study in its Origin, Development and Influence*, New Delhi: Monohar 1992, 78–79; Pal, *Hindu Religion and Iconology*, 3ff.; D.C. Sircar, *The Śākta Pīṭhas*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas 1973, 74–80; Dineścandra Bhaṭṭācārya, “Āgamavāgīśa Bhaṭṭācāryer Kāl Nirṇaya,” *Prabāśī*, Bhadra (1948).

<sup>17</sup> The oldest known manuscript of the *Tantrasāra* is dated Śaka 1554 (1632 CE). The text exists in numerous editions, most notably those of P. Tarkaratna (Calcutta 1927); S.C. Mukherjee (Calcutta 1928); Ramakumāra Rāya (Varanasi: Prācya Prakāśanā 1985); Sadāśiva Śāstrī (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series 1990). For the purposes of this essay, I rely primarily on the Sanskrit and Bengali edition of Śrī Rasikamohana Caṭṭopādhyāya (Calcutta: Navabhārata Pub. 1982).

precarious state of existence.”<sup>18</sup> Not only had Bengal been under Muslim rule for several hundred years, displacing *brāhmaṇic* authority and royal patronage, but a number of powerful, non-*brāhmaṇic* movements emerged in 16th century Bengal. Foremost among these was the popular devotional revival of Śrī Caitanya, who challenged the ritualism and elitism of *brāhmaṇic* orthodoxy, calling for a simple, personal and affective relationship with God. In response, many *brāhmaṇs* of that time, such as the great legal scholar, Raghunandana, had begun to promote an extremely rigid, socially conservative interpretation of Hindu law, in an apparent attempt to defend *brāhmaṇic* power from the rising threats of Islam and popular devotionalism. As Pratapaditya Pal concludes in his study of the *Bṛhat Tantrasāra*,

There was a need to adopt a strong orthodox line . . . because of the great social and religious changes . . . in Bengal. . . . The gradual disintegration of Buddhism . . . the appearance of the Muslims on the political scene and the conversion of masses of people to Islam . . . made it imperative for someone like Kṛṣṇānanda to make some effort to organize and stabilize the Hindu religion.<sup>19</sup>

One of the most striking things about Kṛṣṇānanda, however, is that he was both a highly respected Brahman, renowned as an expert on Hindu law, and a secret practitioner of the most esoteric and transgressive rituals of Tantra. In other words, he led a kind of double life, appearing in the exoteric public sphere as a pure Brahman and

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<sup>18</sup> M.R. Tarafdar, *Husain Shahi Bengal, 1494–1583 AD: A Socio-Political Study*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan 1965, 186. On the Bhakti revival of Caitanya, its social implications and its appeal to the lower classes, see Edward C. Dimock, *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Cult of Bengal*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1966, 41ff; S.K. De, *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press 1942, 29ff.

<sup>19</sup> Pal, *Hindu Religion and Iconology*, 4–5. See also Bhabatosh Bhattacharya, “Raghunandana’s Indebtedness to His Predecessors,” *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 19, no. 2 (1953) 175–176.

in the esoteric private sphere as a *tāntrika*.<sup>20</sup> Like Raghunandana, Kṛṣṇānanda was also a respected *brāhmaṇ*, who was very much concerned with defending traditional *brāhmaṇic* authority.

One of the most powerful new challenges to emerge in this period was the devotional revival inspired by Caitanya, which also took his home town of Navadvīpa as one of its main centers of activity. In fact, there is a popular legend that Caitanya and Kṛṣṇānanda knew each other and developed a deep rivalry. According to this story, the two were fellow students at the grammar school of Gaṅgadāsa, and later, after they had each become prominent theologians, they met for a debate. Apparently, the Vaiṣṇava saint could not tolerate the Tantric teachings of Kṛṣṇānanda, for “Caitanya was so infuriated by the arguments of Kṛṣṇānanda that he attacked him with a stick and drove him away.”<sup>21</sup> Whether or not this story is true, it is a telling commentary on the animosity between Śākta Tantra and Vaiṣṇava bhakti: “Śākta Tantrism had a hard fight against rival religious movements like the Vaiṣṇava revival. . . . The Vaiṣṇava revival became an ideological guide for protest against the bloody ritualism of the Śākta aristocrats.”<sup>22</sup>

In marked contrast to most popular images of Tantra as a subversive, anti-social force, Kṛṣṇānanda presents a highly conservative view of Tantric practice. While he clearly advocates the use of the infamous five M’s and bloody rites of animal sacrifice, he also has strict rules about who can and cannot participate and which rites are prescribed for particular social classes. There is a strong “double norm” at work in Kṛṣṇānanda’s attitude toward gender and caste.<sup>23</sup> In the esoteric

<sup>20</sup> For good discussion of this sort of “double life” among other important *tāntrikas*, see Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom*, and Sanderson, “Purity and Power among the Brahmins of Kashmir.”

<sup>21</sup> Dimock, *The Place of the Hidden Moon*, 43.

<sup>22</sup> Sanjukta Gupta, Teun Goudriaan, and Dirk Jan Hoens, *Hindu Tantrism*, Leiden: Brill 1979, 27.

<sup>23</sup> For a good discussion of a similar double norm at work in South Indian Tantra, see Douglas Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Śākta Tantra*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1990: “Tantrism . . . does not intend to be revolutionary in the sense of establishing a new structure of social

realm of Tantric ritual, ordinary laws of class and purity seem to be suspended or even eradicated altogether: “In the use of wine and sexual intercourse,” Kṛṣṇānanda states, “one should make no distinction of caste” (BTS 697). Yet despite this seemingly egalitarian ideal, he also makes it clear that impure substances like wine and meat can only be consumed by non-twice born castes; above all, a *brāhmaṇ* must never compromise his purity by consuming meat or wine. “The offering of [wine] is only for *sūdras* . . . a *brāhmaṇ* should never offer wine to the Great Goddess. No *brāhmaṇ* . . . should ever consume wine or meat” (BTS 696). Moreover, he states quite clearly that women and *sūdras* have no right to any Vedic ceremonies (BTS 20f).

Many of Kṛṣṇānanda’s rituals center around explicit and calculated violations of conventional laws of purity. One of the most important Tantric rites — which is still today performed routinely in many parts of Bengal — is the rite of animal sacrifice. The sacrifice of animals, of course, goes at least as far back as the Vedas and was at one time the heart of *brāhmaṇic* ritual practice. However, the Tantric sacrifice would appear to deliberately transgress, violate and in many ways completely invert the model of sacrifice described in the Vedas. As Madeleine Biardeau has pointed out, the traditional Vedic sacrifice involved the offering of a pure victim, often identified with the primordial Man, Puruṣa, primarily to pure, male deities. The *tāntrik* sacrifice, conversely, is offered to the Goddess in her most frightening, terrible and violent forms as the one who combats evil and handles impurity, such as Durgā, the fierce battle queen, Kālī, the black mistress of Time and Death, and Chinnamastā, the Goddess who severs her own head as she stands upon a copulating couple.

[T]he Goddess — who calls battle the sacrifice of battle — fears neither blood nor wine. She fears neither impurity nor violence. . . . The violence of the goddess . . . becomes transformed in her ritual into blood sacrifice. . . . The low tasks are left

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egalitarianism. . . . It opens its doors only to a few who . . . seek to distinguish and empower themselves” (70).

to the Goddess so that the purity of the god may be maintained, and extreme Śāktism, known as Tantrism, glorifies her.<sup>24</sup>

The *Bṛhat Tantrasāra* is in fact one of the most important manuals on the iconography of the Goddess, particularly in her most powerful forms such as Dakṣiṇākālī and Śmaśāna Kālī—a terrifying Goddess who “always lives in the cremation ground” holding a “cup filled with wine and meat,” and a “freshly cut human head” while she “smiles and eats rotten meat” (BTS 461).

According to the classical paradigm of the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas, the animal to be sacrificed must be of one of the five pure, that is, domestic animals, namely: a man, a horse, a bull, a ram or a he-goat. It most emphatically should *not* involve wild, undomesticated, impure animals; in fact, if one does so, it is said that father and son will be set at odds and criminals will terrorize the countryside.<sup>25</sup> The Tantric sacrifice, conversely, often uses specifically impure victims; in fact, the buffalo, which is considered one of the most impure of animals, is one of the most common and most important sacrificial offerings in Tantric ritual:

The buffalo . . . is a savage beast . . . a stranger to human society and to the sacrificial world. Although the Vedic literature knows of it . . . it does not count it among the permitted (domestic) animals offered in sacrifice. But it is apt, by this fact, to play the role of the principle that is antithetical to the Goddess, the incarnation of total evil.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Biardeau, “Devi: The Goddess in India,” in *Asian Mythologies*, ed. Yves Bonnefoy, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1993, 98.

<sup>25</sup> Brian K. Smith, *Classifying the Universe: The Ancient Indian Varna System and the Origins of Caste*, New York: Oxford University Press 1994, 250. “If [the priest] were to perform the sacrifice with the jungle animals, father and son would separate, the roads would run apart, the borders of two villages would be far distant, and ravenous beasts, man-tigers, thieves, murderers and robbers would arise in the jungles” (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 13.2.4.1–4).

<sup>26</sup> Madeleine Biardeau and Charles Malamoud, *Le Sacrifice dans l’Inde Ancienne*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France 1976, 146–147. “This is far from the Vedic sacrifice. . . . The victim is an asura, an evil being whom one must get rid of. . . . The

Finally, the manner in which the victim is killed is also a deliberate violation of Vedic norms. In the Vedic rite, the animal must be killed in an unbloody manner, usually strangled with as little violence as possible. As J.C. Heesterman has argued, the later Vedic ritual tradition made a systematic effort to rationalize, marginalize and ultimately excise altogether the impure aspects of the sacrifice. In place of a violent bloody beheading, the later *brāhmaṇic* ritual centers around an unbloody, purified and sanitized system of ritual rules: "Death and disintegration have been eliminated. . . . Death has been rationalized away."<sup>27</sup> This is particularly clear, Heesterman suggests, in the treatment of the head in the Vedic rite; rather than a bloody beheading, the Vedic rite insists on a bloodless strangling outside the sacrificial enclosure.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, "the beheading of an animal is expressly said to be a demonic act."<sup>29</sup>

In the Tantric sacrifice, conversely, the animal is beheaded in a quite bloody manner inside the sacrificial grounds, with a single blow to the neck. Indeed, the entire ritual focuses on the severed head

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victim represents an evil that must be gotten rid of, and this evil seems to be associated with the Goddess" (Biardeau, "Devi: The Goddess in India," 97).

<sup>27</sup> J.C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship and Society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1985, 46.

<sup>28</sup> "What we know as Vedic sacrifice is not sacrifice tout court . . . on a par with its normal practice as we find it to the present day in India. . . . Usually the victim is immolated by cutting off the head. This was originally also the case in the Vedic sacrifice . . . but the Vedic texts explicitly reject this procedure. Instead they prescribe that the victim be killed by suffocation outside the sacrificial enclosure" (Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict*, 87).

<sup>29</sup> O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1976, 155. "It is forbidden to make offerings of the victim's head" (Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict*, 46; see SB 1.2.1.2). Curiously, the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* does describe a ritual of burying five heads—the heads of a man, horse, ox, sheep and goat—in the five directions of the bottom layer of the fire altar (SB VIII.5.2.1). Heesterman argues that this is evidence of an older, pre-*brāhmaṇic* sacrifice based on violent beheading which was later rationalized and replaced by the non-violent ritual of the *brāhmanas* (*The Broken World of Sacrifice: An Essay in Ancient Indian Ritual*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1993, 73).

and the blood, which are then offered to the Goddess. According to Kṛṣṇānanda, the result of this violent, bloody offering of an impure victim is the unleashing of awesome spiritual power. Indeed, the sacrifice can be used not only to achieve any worldly benefit, such as wealth or fame, but also for more malevolent purposes. In fact, Kṛṣṇānanda devotes a good deal of attention to the infamous six acts of black magic, namely, *utsādana* (destruction), *vidveṣaṇa* (causing enmity), *māraṇa* (killing), *uccāṭana* (expulsion), *stambhana* (causing paralysis), *vaśīkaraṇa* (bringing under control), and *mahāhāni karaṇa* (causing great ruin) (BTS 505–509, 561–563). By unleashing the terrible power of the Goddess through sacrificial violence, the *tāntrika* can slay his enemies, enchant women and ultimately even “bring the entire region under control” (BTS 507f.). For example, Kṛṣṇānanda describes several procedures for disposing of one’s enemies, including blood sacrifice to the Goddess. The victim is explicitly identified with the enemy, and the bloody decapitation and dismemberment of the beast becomes the surest means to slay one’s political, military or financial opponent:

He should infuse it with the spirit of the enemy, saying, “this is my enemy whom I hate, in the form of this beast.” Reciting the mantra, “Destroy, O Great Goddess, *sphēṅ sphēṅ*, devour, devour!” he should place flowers on the head of the victim. . . . Reciting the mantra, “Āḥ Huṃ Phaṭ,” he should behead [the victim]. . . . [H]e should offer the blood and head to the Goddess Durgā. (BTS 509)

In sum, the Tantric sacrifice seems to involve a series of calculated, structural inversions of many older Vedic paradigms: an impure, wild victim is substituted for a pure one; a bloody beheading is substituted for a non-violent strangling; the wrathful, violent Goddess takes the place of the pure male God, etc. These could be outlined as described in Table 1.

However, the most powerful and explicitly transgressive Tantric rites are the secret left handed practices (*vāmācāra*), which involve the intentional manipulation of impure substances; these include the well-known “five M’s” (*pañcamakāra*), namely, meat (*māṃsa*), wine (*madya*), fish (*matsya*), parched grain (*mudrā*) and sexual intercourse

TABLE 1

|                         | Vedic Sacrifice                                        | Tantric sacrifice                                                                                |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Victim</b>           | Domestic animal                                        | Wild animal                                                                                      |
| <b>Status of victim</b> | Pure                                                   | Impure                                                                                           |
| <b>Means of killing</b> | Unbloody strangling<br>outside the ritual<br>enclosure | Bloody beheading inside<br>the ritual enclosure;<br>offering of head and blood<br>to the Goddess |
| <b>Deity</b>            | Pure male deity                                        | Goddess, handler of<br>impurity                                                                  |

(*maithuna*) (BTS 698–703). And for Kṛṣṇānanda, the last of these appears to be the most important, occupying as it does the last 25 pages of his text (significantly more than any of the other Ms, which are treated fairly briefly). As Kṛṣṇānanda observes, “the pleasure derived from sexual union is of the nature of Supreme Bliss” (BTS 703). The ritual of *maithuna*, however, is a kind of deliberately inverted sexual act, which involves intercourse not only with high class partners but also with untouchables, prostitutes, and various other mixed and low classes (BTS 694).

From the standpoint of mainstream Hindu Bengali culture, of course, this mingling of unmarried partners in violation of class relations is the worst imaginable transgression. As Ronald Inden and Ralph Nicholas have observed in their study of Hindu life cycle rites (*samskāras*) in Bengal, proper marriage and sexual relations between compatible castes are crucial to the larger social order; the married couple is believed to be joined as one body, sharing the same bodily substances and so incorporated into the larger social body.<sup>30</sup> Thus, an improper relation or an improper combination of coded bodily substances such as semen and blood would threaten to upset the whole delicate balance of the social body; indeed, it has “the capacity to ruin the entire order of

<sup>30</sup> Ronald B. Inden and Ralph W. Nicholas, *Kinship in Bengali Culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1986, 23–47. “The marriage of man and woman . . . makes their previously unrelated bodies the same body” (*ibid.* 23).



*jātis* in the community. . . . [T]he improper combination of coded bodily substances entailed the improper combination of worship and occupational substances as well.”<sup>31</sup> Yet this in a sense the explicit point of the Tantric rite.

It is important to note, however, that Kṛṣṇānanda does in fact still maintain his highly conservative and elitist double norm even when it comes to the rite of *maithuna*. Thus, while he prescribes intercourse in violation of class laws for most practitioners, he also insists that *brāhmaṇs* should still have intercourse only with *brāhmaṇ* partners (BTS 694). In other words, his seemingly radical, transgressive rites are still in many ways careful circumscribed, particularly for those at the top of the social hierarchy, such as *brāhmaṇs* like himself.

Having consecrated the female partner as an embodiment of the Goddess, the *tāntrika* then engages in a ritualized form of intercourse that is explicitly compared to a sacrificial ritual: Unlike many later forms of Tantric practice, which involve non-ejaculation and retention of semen, Kṛṣṇānanda’s ritual reflects a different and probably older form of sexual practice, which even has precedents in early Vedic rites.<sup>32</sup> Here the central act is the ejaculation of semen into the female vagina, which is likened to ladling the oblation onto the sacrificial fire.

As he releases his semen, he should say the great *mantra*, “Drunken, and clinging to the two hands of the Light and the Sky, *śrucā*! I make the offering of *dharma* and *adharma* into the blazing fire of the Self, *svāhām*!” . . . Sexual union is the libation; the sacred precept is the shedding of semen. (BTS 702)

The aim of the ritual, however, is not the conception of a child; rather, the goal is first to ejaculate into the vagina and then to carefully extract

<sup>31</sup> Ronald B. Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1976, 52.

<sup>32</sup> On this point see David Gordon White, “Tantric Sects and Tantric Sex: The Flow of Secret Tantric Gnosis,” in *Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in the History of Religions*, ed. Elliot R. Wolfson, New York: Seven Bridges Press 1999, 249–270. Sexual union is also compared to a sacrificial rite in much earlier texts such as the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* VI.4.12. See Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1969, 254–255.

the combined semen and menstrual fluid, called the *kula dravya* or lineage substance.

In India generally, bodily fluids, and above all sexual fluids, are considered both powerful and potentially polluting, as the ambivalent leftovers that overflow the boundaries of the body. In the Tantric rite, however, the sexual fluids are the ultimate source of power. According to Kṛṣṇānanda, this *kula dravya* is the most awesome and dangerous of substances; in fact, he specifically refers to it using the term *ucchiṣṭa* — that is, the sacrificial “remnant” or “leftover.”

With the sacrificial elements, the semen, unbroken grains of rice, perfume, flowers, O Deveṣī, he should worship the Goddess in the vagina. . . . With incense, lamps and various food offerings, the Kula adept should honor her in various ways, and then he should [consume] the remnants [*ucchiṣṭa*] himself. (BTS 703)

As Charles Malamoud points out, *ucchiṣṭa* is a technical term used in the Vedic sacrifice to refer to that portion of the victim that is left over once all the offerings have been made. Like leftovers generally in India, it is considered impure and polluting; but at the same time, it is also considered to be the powerful “seed” that gives birth to the next sacrifice: “Power is . . . derived from forces that are contaminating; these forces belong to the violent substratum of chaos out of which the world has emerged. . . . The sacrifice produces new life — the divine seed — from the disintegration of a previous existence. . . . It is the impure remainder of the sacrifice that gives birth to the new life produced from death.”<sup>33</sup> The same aura of dangerous power surrounds the left-over of the Tantric rite or sexual sacrifice. If consumed outside the secret ritual, it will send one to the most terrible of hells: “Apart from the time of worship, one must never touch a naked Śakti. And apart from the period of worship, the nectar must never be drunk by adepts. Touching it, their lives are lost, and drinking it, they would go to hell. Thus is the Kula worship” (BTS 704); but once placed in

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<sup>33</sup> David Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in South Indian Śaiva Tradition*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980, 347. See Charles Malamoud, *Cooking the World: Ritual and Thought in Ancient India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press 1996, 7–10.

a sacrificial vessel and consecrated by the Goddess, the *kula dravya* is transformed into divine nectar, *amṛta*. By consuming this nectar, he writes, the *tāntrika* will enjoy supreme bliss and fulfillment of all worldly and otherworldly desires.

Then with great effort, he must obtain the precious Kula nectar. For with that divine nectar, all [the gods] are pleased. Whatever the wise man desires, he will immediately attain. . . . Having purified the Kula substance, which has the nature of Śiva and Śakti, and having deposited this nectar of life, which is of the nature of the Supreme Brahman, in a sacrificial vessel, [he attains] the eternally blameless state free of all distinctions. (BTS 703)

At this point, one might begin to wonder: what does the female partner get out of all of this? What's in it for the woman? Ironically, Kṛṣṇānanda has relatively little to say about the woman. Although she is considered an embodiment of the supreme power of the Goddess and her body is infused with a variety of divine forces, she seems to have little role other than as a tool to be manipulated in esoteric ritual. Kṛṣṇānanda states quite clearly, in fact, that women and *sūdras* have no right to any Vedic ceremonies (BTS 20f.). In any case, although she is temporarily empowered in the esoteric space of the ritual, she must return to her usual place of submission in the public social world. She is, in a sense, the raw source of energy to be extracted and consumed by the male *tāntrika*, who realizes the awesome power of the Goddess within himself.<sup>34</sup>

All of this, however, leaves us with a basic question: what is the point of all this transgression and inversion of normal laws? Above all, why would a respected male *brāhmaṇ* like Kṛṣṇānanda be interested in any of this? Well, it was at least in part, I would suggest, a response to the particular social and political situation in which he lived, during a period of Muslim rule, amidst the spread of rival religious movements that did not favor *brāhmaṇs* like Kṛṣṇānanda. As Douglas Brooks has

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<sup>34</sup> On this point, see Urban, *The Economics of Ecstasy: Tantra, Secrecy and Power in Colonial Bengal*, New York: Oxford University Press 2001, ch. 2. As Brooks observes, "Women . . . are made subordinate to and dependent on males and their ritual role is . . . limited to being a partner for male adepts" (*Auspicious Wisdom*, 25–26).

argued in the case of South Indian Tantra, many conservative *brāhmaṇs* turned to these esoteric rituals at a time when their own traditional status and privileges were most threatened by rival religious and political forces. “Tantric ritual continues to provide a means by which Brahman society perpetuates the perception of itself as privileged in the midst of radical social changes that do not always privilege Brahmins.”<sup>35</sup> With its elaborate ceremony and sacrifices, Tantra thus *reaffirmed* the traditional of *brāhmaṇs* as ritual experts, at a time when it was most being called into question.

At the same time, however, Kṛṣṇānanda was also engaged in ritual manipulations of impurity, handling the dangerous power of polluting substances like buffalo blood, semen and menstrual fluids. As Mary Douglas observed in her classic study, *Purity and Danger*, “The danger risked by boundary transgression is power. The vulnerable margins which threaten to destroy order represent powers in the cosmos. . . . Ritual which can harness these . . . is harnessing power indeed.”<sup>36</sup> By systematically violating and deliberately inverting normal laws of purity, the *tāntrika* unleashes the terrible power of the Goddess in her most awesome forms, as the ultimate power that creates and devours the universe. In so doing, he also asserts his own super-human power to transcend the boundaries of pure and impure, clean and unclean, to overstep the limitations of the social order and physical universe alike. As Alexis Sanderson has argued in his study of Kashmir Śaivite Tantra, the aim of this transgression is precisely to attain a kind of “unfettered super-agency through the assimilation of their lawless power in occult manipulations of impurity.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom*, 188. On this point, see also Hugh B. Urban, “Elitism and Esotericism: Strategies of Secrecy and Power in South Indian Tantra and French Freemasonry,” *Numen* 44 (1997) 1–38.

<sup>36</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 190–191.

<sup>37</sup> Sanderson, “Purity and Power,” 200–201. “We witness the strategies by which . . . radical sects were brought in from the visionary fringes to . . . areas of orthodox self-representation. . . . [T]he visionary power of the heterodox self is recoded . . . to be inscribed *within* the orthodox social identity . . . in such a way that it reveals the

In sum, the esoteric rituals of Tantra are by no means always the subversive, anti-social force that most early European scholars believed them to be. At least in the case of Kṛṣṇānanda in 16th century Bengal, I would suggest, they played a highly *conservative* role.<sup>38</sup> These secret, transgressive rites were in fact a means to reassert his own elite power, precisely at a time when it was most threatened by rival religious and political forces.

## II. *Unleashing the Beast: Aleister Crowley and Western Sexual Magic*

The sexual act is a sacrament of Will. To profane it is the great offense. All true expression of it is lawful; all suppression or distortion of it is contrary to the Law of liberty.

Aleister Crowley, *The Law is for All*<sup>39</sup>

What I would like to do now is jump forward about 400 years and to the other side of the planet, to look at the role of secret ritual and transgression in modern Western magic — and in particular, in the work of the notorious Great Beast, 666, Aleister Crowley. Infamous throughout the popular press as the “king of depravity, arch-traitor and drug fiend,” Crowley is today one of the most influential figures in the revival of Western occultism and neo-pagan witchcraft. Yet surprisingly, despite many popular and hagiographic works on Crowley, he has seldom been taken seriously by modern scholarship, and even scholars of Western esotericism have typically dismissed

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latter as a lower nature within the one person. . . . The tradition sustains its ‘power’ behind the appearance of conformity” (*ibid.* 191).

<sup>38</sup> On this point, see Gupta et al., *Hindu Tantrism*: “Anti-caste statements should never be read outside their ritual context. Returned to ordinary life, no high caste Tantric would think of breaking social taboos. . . . The ritual egalitarianism of Tantrism in practice acted as a caste-confirming . . . force” (32). See also the works of Brooks and Sanderson cited above.

<sup>39</sup> Crowley, *The Law is for All: The Authorized Popular Commentary on Liber AL Vel Legis sub figura CCXX, The Book of the Law*, Temple, AZ: New Falcon Publications 1996, 42. “We refuse to regard love as shameful and degrading. . . . To us it is the means by which the animal may be made the Winged Sphinx which shall bear man aloft to the House of the Gods” (*ibid.* 49).

him as either a demented pervert or a ridiculous crank.<sup>40</sup> However, as his most recent biographer, Lawrence Sutin, has persuasively argued, Crowley was far more than the satanic drug fiend attacked by the media; he was in fact a striking reflection of some of the most important literary, philosophical and cultural forces of the early 20th century.<sup>41</sup> So what I hope to do here is to use my comments on Bengali Tantra as a metaphoric foil to shed some new light on Crowley and to suggest that there is perhaps some deeper method to his apparent madness.

Born in 1875, the son of a minister in the highly puritanical Plymouth Brethren sect, Edward Alexander Crowley expressed some of the deepest tensions within the British Victorian era as a whole. A child raised in strict Christian morality, he would later turn to the occult arts and to extremes of sexual excess. Well educated at Trinity College in Cambridge, Crowley inherited a large amount of money while still young and was therefore free for many years to pursue his passions of poetry, mountain-climbing and the occult arts. While still at Trinity, he would also adopt the name “Aleister” (an homage to the hero of Shelley’s poem, “Alastor, the Spirit of solitude”) and also publish his first book of poetry and his infamous erotic collection, *White Stains* (1898).

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<sup>40</sup> For example, Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman’s volume on *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, New York: Crossroad 1992, makes not even a single reference to Crowley.

<sup>41</sup> Lawrence Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley*, New York: St. Martin’s Press 2000. In addition to Crowley’s own autobiography (*The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autohagiography*, ed. John Symonds, New York: Hill and Wang 1969), there are many popular biographies; see John Symonds, *The Great Beast: The Life of Aleister Crowley*, New York: Roy Pub. 1952; and *The Magic of Aleister Crowley*, London: Frederick Muller, Ltd. 1958; Francis King, *The Magical World of Aleister Crowley*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson 1977; Gerald Suster, *The Legacy of the Beast: the Life, Work and Influence of Aleister Crowley*, York Beach, ME: Weiser 1989. Crowley’s classic work on “Magick” generally is his *Magick in Theory and Practice*, New York: Castle Books 1960, though he wrote a huge amount of other works on the subject which cannot all be cited here.

Crowley's first initiation into the world of esotericism and magic occurred in 1898, when he was introduced to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. An eclectic order combining elements of Kabbalah, Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism, the Golden Dawn attracted a number of famous artists and intellectuals of the day, including Irish poet, W.B. Yeats. Rather significantly, however, Crowley would leave the movement and become mired in a series of lawsuits after he published a full description of the most secret rites of the Golden Dawn in his own journal, *Equinox*.<sup>42</sup> Revealing secrets, we will see, was something of an obsession for Crowley.

However, it was in 1904 that Crowley received his first great revelation and the knowledge that he was in fact to be the herald of a new era in history. According to his own account, his guardian angel, Aiwass, appeared to him dictated a text called the *Book of the Law* or *Liber AL vel Legis*.<sup>43</sup> According to the Book of the Law, we have now entered the third great age in history: the first aeon was that of Isis, based on matriarchy and worship of the mother goddess; the second aeon was that of Osiris, during which the patriarchal religion of suffering and death (namely Christianity) was dominant. Finally, with the revelation of the Book of the Law, the corrupt age of Christianity had come to an end, and a new aeon of the child, Horus, was born. The guiding principle of this new era is the law of Thelema, derived from Greek, meaning Will. According to Crowley's maxim: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law." In place of servile submission to some imaginary God, the law of Thelema is the full affirmation of the Self and the free expression of the individual will: "The Law

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<sup>42</sup> Colin Wilson, *The Occult*, New York: Vintage Books 1973, 362.

<sup>43</sup> Actually, the revelation came first through Crowley's wife, Rose, during their trip to Cairo, when the voice of the god Horus allegedly began to speak through her. She later revealed that the being speaking through her was an emissary of Horus named Aiwass, and Crowley eventually claimed to have received the *Book of the Law* directly from Aiwass without Rose's mediation.

of Thelema avows and justifies selfish-ness; it confirms the inmost conviction of each one of us that he is the centre of the cosmos.”<sup>44</sup>

Despite his claim that “every man and woman is a star,” however, Crowley’s ideal social order was far from egalitarian and in fact quite elitist. Rejecting the principles democracy and equality as effete, emasculated left-overs of Christianity, he asserted power of the strong over the weak, the aristocratic over the dull service masses. As he wrote in 1937, in his *Scientific Solution to the Problem of Government*, the true ruler has no use for absurdities such as *liberté, égalité, fraternité* or the assertion that all men are equal or that woman is equal to man:

The ruler asserts facts as they are; the slave has therefore no option but to deny them passionately, in order to express his discontent. . . . The Master ( . . . the Magus) does not concern himself with facts . . . he uses truth and falsehood indiscriminately, to serve his ends. Slaves consider him immoral, and preach against him in Hyde Park.<sup>45</sup>

Crowley had high hopes that his new law of Thelema would be adopted by the major political figures of his day and so become the foundation for a new social order of the future. According to his own notes, he believed that the nation that first accepted the Book of the Law would become the leading nation the world. In fact, he initially saw Hitler and the rising power of fascism as a possible vehicle for spreading his law of Thelema.<sup>46</sup> He read and made copious notes on Hitler’s own writings, which he found much in agreement with his

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<sup>44</sup> Crowley, *The Confessions*, 873, 939. “The company of heaven is Mankind, and its unveiling is the assertion of the . . . godhead of every man and every woman!” (*The Law is for All*, 25).

<sup>45</sup> Crowley, *The Book of Lies, which is also falsely called Breaks*, New York: S. Weiser 1952, 100. “The only solution of the Social Problem is the creation of a class with the true patriarchal feeling” (*ibid.* 172).

<sup>46</sup> He was particularly fascinated by Hitler’s comment that, “Our revolution is not merely a political and social revolution; we are at the outset to form a tremendous revolution in moral ideas and in men’s spiritual orientation.” Crowley’s comment was simply: “AL, the whole book.” Similarly, next to Hitler’s statement, “After all these centuries of whining about the protection of the poor and lowly it is about time



Law of Thelema;<sup>47</sup> and he tried several times to have copies of his work placed in Hitler's hands, suggesting that it would provide "a philosophical basis for Nazism."<sup>48</sup> Quite remarkably, however, when his attempts to sway the Führer failed, Crowley would just as eagerly try to sell his Law of Thelema to the British government, as the most necessary way to counter the growing German threat.<sup>49</sup>

The key to Crowley's Law of Thelema—and also the primary reason for the scandalous reputation that followed him—was his practice of sexual magic. For Crowley, sex is the most powerful force in human nature and the supreme expression of the will; but it has been stupidly repressed by the Church and so given birth to all manner of social and psychological ills:

Mankind must learn that the sexual instinct is . . . ennobling. The shocking evils which we all deplore are principally due to the perversions produced by suppressions. The feeling that it is shameful and the sense of sin cause concealment, which is ignoble and internal conflict which creates distortion,

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we decided to protect the strong against the inferior," Crowley wrote an enthusiastic "Yes!" (Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 48).

<sup>47</sup> Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 376, 377.

<sup>48</sup> "One of my colleagues informed me . . . that the Fuhrer was looking for a philosophical basis for Nazi principles. . . . Some of my adherents in Germany are trying to approach the Fuhrer with a view to putting my Book of the Law in its proper position as the Bible of the New Aeon. I expect that you will be in close touch with the Chancellor . . . and I should be very grateful if you would put the matter before them. . . . Hitler himself says emphatically in *Mein Kampf* that the world needs a new religion, that he himself is not a religious teacher, but that when the proper man appears he will be welcome" (Crowley, Letter to George Sylvester Viereck, July 31, 1936 [O.T.O. Archives], cited in Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 378).

<sup>49</sup> "The Law of Thelema is an altogether new instrument of Government, infinitely elastic, in the proper hands, from the very fact of its scientific rigidity. I offer this Law to His Most Gracious Majesty in my duty as a loyal and devoted subject and I suggest that it be adopted secretly by His Majesty's Government so that I may be supported by the appropriate services in my efforts to establishing this Law as the basis of conduct, to the better security and . . . government of the Commonwealth" (Crowley, "Propositions for consideration of H.M. [His Majesty's] Government," October 1936, quoted in Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 380).

neurosis and ends in explosion. We deliberately produce an abscesses and wonder why it is full of pus, why it hurts, why it bursts in stench and corruption.

The Book of the Law solves the sexual problem completely. Each individual has an absolute right to satisfy his sexual instinct as is physiologically proper for him. The one injunction is to treat all such acts as sacraments.<sup>50</sup>

Crowley's sexual magic is itself a complex melding of both Eastern and Western traditions; in fact, Crowley would become one of the most important figures in the transmission of Tantra to the West—though with significant reinterpretations and transformations. As early as 1902, Crowley had been introduced to Tantra during his travels in India and Sri Lanka.<sup>51</sup> But he would also combine his knowledge of Tantric practices with a very different tradition of sexual magic emerging in the West. Much of this derives from an American named Paschal Beverly Randolph, the son of a wealthy Virginian father and a slave mother, who lived from 1825–1875. A well-known spiritualist, Randolph also developed the most influential system of effectual alchemy or sexual magic in modern times. According to Randolph, the moment of orgasm is the most intense and powerful experience in human life, for it is the moment when the soul is suddenly opened to the divine realm and the breath of God infuses life into this world. In Randolph's words, "True sex power is God power."<sup>52</sup> As such, the power of orgasm can be used

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<sup>50</sup> Crowley, *Confessions*, 874–875; cf. *The Law is for All*, 51.

<sup>51</sup> See Crowley, "The Temple of Solomon the King," *Equinox* I (4) (London 1910), 150. Crowley's main texts on sex magic include: *Of the Nature of the Gods*; *Liber Agape*, the *Book of the Unveiling of the Sangraal de Arte Magica*, and *Of the Homunculus*, most of which are included in Francis King, ed., *The Secret Rituals of the O.T.O.*, New York: Samuel Weiser 1973. On Crowley's possible Tantric influences, see Urban, "The Omnipotent Oom: Tantra and its Impact on Modern Western Esotericism," *Esoterica: The Journal of Esoteric Studies* 3 (2001) 218–259; Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 92, 127, 141, 188. As Symonds suggests, "His greatest merit was to make the bridge between Tantrism and the Western esoteric tradition and thus bring together Western and Eastern magical techniques" (Introduction to *The Confessions*, xxv).

<sup>52</sup> Randolph, *The Ansairitic Mystery: A New Revelation Concerning Sex!*, Toledo: Toledo Sun, Liberal Printing House, n.d. [c.1873]), reprinted in John Patrick Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph: A Nineteenth Century American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian*

for a variety of this-worldly and otherworldly ends: both to achieve mystical experience and to create magical effects, such as financial gain or winning the affections of straying lover.<sup>53</sup>

Randolph's teachings on sex magic were then passed to a number of European secret societies and esoteric brotherhoods, the most important of which was the Ordo Templi Orientis or O.T.O., founded by Karl Kellner and Theodor Reuss in the late 19th century.<sup>54</sup> According to the Reuss, the secret of sexual magic is in fact the innermost heart of all esoteric traditions and the key to all occult mysteries. As the O.T.O. proclaimed in the journal, *Oriflamme*, in 1912,

One of the secrets which our order possesses in its highest grades is that it gives members the means to re-erect the temple of Solomon in men, to re-find the lost Word. . . . Our Order possesses the Key which unlocks all Masonic and Hermetic

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*and Sex Magician*, Albany: SUNY 1997, 317. See also Randolph, *Eulis! The History of Love: Its Wondrous Magic, Chemistry, Rules, Laws, Modes and Rationale; Being the Third Revelation of Soul and Sex*, Toledo: Randolph Publishing Co. 1974; *Magia Sexualis*, Paris: Robert Telin 1931.

<sup>53</sup> Randolph lists over a hundred uses for sexual magic, which include everything from acquiring money to the secret of domestic happiness. One of the most striking features of Randolph's sexual magic is his insistence that both partners must have an active role and that both must achieve orgasm for the magic to be successful: "For the prayer to be effective the paroxysm of both is necessary. . . . [T]he woman's orgasms should coincide with man's emission, for only in this way will the magic be fulfilled" (*Magia Sexualis*, 76–78).

<sup>54</sup> Kellner claims to have been initiated by an Arab fakir and two Indian yogis, from whom he learned "the mysteries of yoga and the philosophy of the left hand path which he called sexual magic" (Symonds, *The Magic of Aleister Crowley*, 95). On Reuss and his knowledge of Tantra, see A.R. Naylor, ed., *Theodor Reuss and Aleister Crowley, O.T.O. Rituals and Sex Magick*, Thames: Essex House 1999. Peter Koenig argues that the O.T.O. was not founded by Kellner but only formed after his death under Reuss' leadership. Kellner was the head of a small group known as the "Inner Triangle" and did practice some quasi-Tantric rites in the attempt to create the "elixir, that is: male and female sexual fluids" ("Spermo-Gnostics and the O.T.O.," available online at <http://www.cyberlink.ch/~koenig/spermo.htm>). On the O.T.O., see Peter-Robert Koenig, "The OTO Phenomenon," *Theosophical History* 4, no. 3 (1992) 92–98; Frater U.D., *Secrets of Western Sex Magic*, St. Paul: Llewellyn 2001, 3ff.

secrets, it is the teaching of sexual magic and this teaching explains all the riddles of nature, all Masonic symbolism and all religious systems.<sup>55</sup>

Eventually, the O.T.O. would also develop a complex series of grades of initiation, the highest of which focused auto-erotic, heterosexual and homosexual magic.

Crowley became involved with the O.T.O. beginning in 1910, and would soon become its most infamous and influential leader. According to Crowley, sex magic is the most powerful of all magical operations, for it is the raw power of human creativity, which, when combined with the power of the human will, has the potential to bring into being anything that one desires:

[I]f this secret [of sexual magic] which is a scientific secret were perfectly understood, as it is not by me after more than twelve years' almost constant study and experiment, there would be nothing which the human imagination can conceive that could not be realized in practice. . . . If it were desired to have an element of atomic weight six times that of uranium that element could be produced.<sup>56</sup>

Many of Crowley's sexual rites centered around explicit transgressions and calculated inversions of conventional morality and religious practice. For example, one of the most elaborate rituals that he de-

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<sup>55</sup> *Oriflamme* (1912) 18, reproduced in R. Swinburne Clymer, *The Rosicrucian Fraternity in America: Authentic and Spurious Organizations*, Quakertown: The Rosicrucian Foundation, n.d., II 541. For a good discussion of Reuss' sex magic, see Koenig, "Spermo-Gnostics and the O.T.O.": "The whole body was considered Divine . . . and the sexual organs were meant to fulfill a peculiar function: a Holy Mass was the symbolic act of re-creating the universe. . . . Sexually joining is a shadow of the cosmic act of creation. Performed by adepts, the union of male and female approaches the primal act and partakes of its divine nature."

<sup>56</sup> Crowley, *The Confessions*, 767. Most of the sexual rites were revealed in the VIII, IX and XI of the O.T.O. degrees. As Koenig comments, "Crowley's VIIIth degree unveiled . . . that masturbating on a sigil of a demon or meditating upon the image of a phallus would bring power or communication with a divine being. . . . The IXth degree was labelled heterosexual intercourse where the sexual secrets were sucked out of the vagina and when not consumed . . . put on a sigil to attract this or that demon to fulfill the pertinent wish" ("Spermo-Gnostics and the O.T.O.").

signed for the O.T.O. was a full scale Gnostic Mass—a complex, highly choreographed ceremony. In the course of the ritual, the semen and menses are symbolized by the sacred host, as the priest pierces the priestess with his “sacred lance,” symbolizing the supreme union of male and female energies.

In the Gnostic Mass, semen and menses—which may be transformed into physico-spiritual essences (the Great Work or Summum Bonum) by those in possession of the secret—are symbolized by the Priest (who bears ‘the Sacred Lance’) and the Priestess. . . . These two partake of the sacred Cake of Light and Cup of Wine. During the ritual, the Priest parts a sacred veil with his Lance and embraces the knees of the Priestess, who has removed her robes to embody the sacred nakedness of the Goddess.<sup>57</sup>

However, Crowley’s most explicitly transgressive practices began in the years between 1920 and 1923, when he founded his own Abbey of Thelema at a farmhouse in Sicily. According to his diaries from this period, Crowley believed that he had transcended all moral boundaries and all material distinctions, such that even the most defiling of substances became for him divine. Thus, he describes one performance of his Gnostic mass in which the sacred Host was replaced with the excrement of his consort, Leah Hirsig, which she then forced him to eat as the true Body of God. As Crowley recounts,

My mouth burned; my throat choked, my belly wretched; my blood fled wither who knows. . . . She ate all the body of God and with Her soul’s compulsion made me eat. . . . My teeth grew rotten, my tongue ulcered, raw was my throat, spasm-torn my belly, and all my Doubt of that which to Her teeth was moonlight and to her tongue ambrosia; to her throat nectar, in her belly the One God.<sup>58</sup>

On another occasion, Crowley describes the performance of a blood sacrifice involved both ritual and sexual transgression. The ceremony

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<sup>57</sup> Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 234. See also Crowley, *Magick: Liber ABA, Book Four Parts I–IV*, York Beach: Samuel Weiser 1997, 267–269, and Theodor Reuss’ translation of Crowley’s Gnostic Mass: “Die Gnostische Messe,” in P.R. Koenig, *Der Grosse Theodor Reuss Reader*, Munich 1997.

<sup>58</sup> John Symonds and Kenneth Grant, eds. *The Diaries of Aleister Crowley: The Magical Record of the Beast 666*, London: Duck Editions 2001, 235.

was to consist in the beheading of a goat at the very moment that it ejaculated as it had intercourse with his Scarlet Woman, so that the drinking of its blood could be a true “drinking thereof from the Cup of our Lady of Whoredom.”<sup>59</sup> Unfortunately, the goat seemed uninterested in performing the sexual part of the ritual, and Crowley was forced to complete that portion himself.

Clearly, Crowley was going somewhat against the grain of the conventional values of the Victorian world in which he was born. As Patricia Anderson observes in her study of 19th century British sexual attitudes, much of the discourse of the Victorian era was particularly focused on the importance of heterosexual marriage for the stability of society; in an era that valued economic productivity, generation of capital and restraint in consumption, healthy sexuality had to be useful, productive and efficient: “normal heterosexuality appeared in one guise . . . attraction between men and women that led to marriage and family. Normal sex was consistent with the values of Victorian industrial society—it was another mode of production.”<sup>60</sup> Crowley, it would seem, set out deliberately to destroy that useful, productive social order through the most extreme acts of consumption and excess.

Despite their deliberately shocking and offensive character, however, Crowley’s rituals were by no means simple orgiastic hedonism or mindless antinomianism. On the contrary, these were elaborate, choreographed ceremonies that required the strict observation of laws of sanctity before the explosive energy of transgressive violence and sexuality could be unleashed. These were rites that depended, not unlike the Śākta Tantric rituals, on a clear logic of structural inversion and systematic violation of basic social categories. Thus, the Christian bread and wine are replaced by semen and menstrual blood; the

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<sup>59</sup> Crowley, July 19, 1921 diary entry, O.T.O. archives, quoted in Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 293.

<sup>60</sup> Patricia Anderson, *When Passion Reigned: Sex and the Victorians*, New York: Basic Books 1995, 17–18. See also John Maynard, “Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion,” *University of Hartford Studies in Literature* 19 (1987) 61.

body of Christ is replaced by the excrement of a woman; conventional marriage and intercourse are replaced by bestiality and blood sacrifice.

Much like the Bengali *tāntrikas*, moreover, Crowley found in these explicit acts of transgression the key to a tremendous source of power. Through these occult manipulations of impure substances, such as semen, blood, and excrement, he claimed to have unleashed a magical will that could fulfill any spiritual or material desire, from intercourse with the gods to financial well-being. (In fact, many of his sexual magical operations were performed with the explicit aim of coming up with some quick cash when he had begun to deplete his bank account).<sup>61</sup>

A Sorcerer by the power of his magick had subdued all things to himself. . . . He could fly through space more swiftly than the stars. Would he eat, drink, and take his pleasure? There was none that did not obey his bidding. In the whole system of ten million times ten million spheres upon the two and twenty million planes he had his desire.<sup>62</sup>

In his most exalted moments, Crowley believed that he could achieve a supreme spiritual power: the power to conceive a divine child or spiritual fetus that would transcend the mortal failings of the body born of a mere woman. This goal of creating an immortal child, Crowley suggests, lies at the heart of many esoteric traditions through history:

This is the great idea of magicians in all times: To obtain a Messiah by some adaptation of the sexual process. In Assyria they tried incest . . . Greeks and Syrians mostly bestiality. . . . The Mohammedans tried homosexuality; medieval philosophers tried to produce homunculi by making chemical experiments with semen. But the root idea is that any form of procreation other than normal is likely to produce results of a magical character.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Crowley suggests that, among other things, one might use sexual magic to “perform an operation to have \$20,000,” by focusing all one’s will upon an object at the moment of orgasm, one can powerfully influence the course of events and achieve the desired goal (Symonds, *The Magic of Aleister Crowley*, 141–142).

<sup>62</sup> Crowley, *The Book of Lies*, 63.

<sup>63</sup> Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice*, London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent 1911, 385–386. On the creation of alchemical androgynes, see Urban, “Birth Done

In sum, the secret of sexual magic has the potential to unleash a power of truly messianic proportions, a power that heralds the dawn of the new aeon.

As we can see in this passage, Crowley seems to have regarded women as rather limited and ultimately expendable companions in spiritual practice. Though he used a variety of female partners or “Scarlet women” in his magical rites, he seems to have regarded the highest stages of practice as rituals of homosexual intercourse.<sup>64</sup> He was, moreover, notorious for his psychological and physical exploitation of women, and for his generally condescending, at times quite misogynistic attitude toward women generally. As he put it, “women, like all moral inferiors, behave well only when treated with firmness, kindness and justice.”<sup>65</sup>

### *III. The Power of the Impure: The Play of Taboo and Transgression*

In the region where the autonomy of the subject breaks away from all restraints, where the categories of good and evil, of pleasure and pain, are infinitely surpassed . . . where there is no longer any form or mode that means anything but the instantaneous annihilation of whatever might claim to be a form or mode, so great a spiritual energy is needed that it is all but inconceivable. On this scale, the chain releases of atomic energy are nothing.

Bataille, *The Accursed Share*<sup>66</sup>

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Better: Conceiving the Immortal Fetus in India, China and Renaissance Europe,” in *Notes on a Maṇḍala: Essays in Honor of Wendy Doniger*, ed. Laurie Patton, New York: Seven Bridges Press 2002.

<sup>64</sup> On Crowley’s views toward homosexuality, see Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 183–184. Thus the highest XI degree of Crowley’s O.T.O passed beyond the stages of auto-erotic and heterosexual practice to that of homo-erotic practice. See Konig, “Spermo-Gnostics and the O.T.O.”; Frater U.D., *Secrets of Western Sex Magic*, 138.

<sup>65</sup> Crowley, *Confessions*, 370. Elsewhere he notes, “Women are nearly always conscious of an important part of their true Will, the bearing of children. To them nothing else is serious by comparison” (*The Law is for all*, 133). See also Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 359, 199, 329–330.

<sup>66</sup> Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. 2, 183–184.



Secrecy lies at the very core of power.

Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*<sup>67</sup>

I would like to pause here and offer some comparative reflections on these two examples of Bengali Tantra and modern Western magic, widely separated as they are both historically and geographically. Obviously, I am by no means suggesting that these two cases are in any way the same, nor I am suggesting that they are each temporal reflections of some transcendent archetype or universal pattern. Rather, beginning from the ground up instead from the top down, I am suggesting that they are each manipulating the body and physical substances in ways that shed some useful light on one another. By juxtaposing these two cases like a metaphor, playing upon both their striking differences and their surprising similarities, I think we can gain new insight into both phenomena, as well as new light on a larger theoretical problem in the study of religion. The result, I hope, is something like what Paul Ricoeur calls the experience of *semantic shock*, or the sudden flash of insight that results from a truly striking metaphor.<sup>68</sup>

In both the cases of Śākta tantra and Crowleyian magic, we find esoteric rituals that center in large part around the manipulation of bodily substances that are normally considered impure and defiling, such as blood, semen, menses and excrement; both involve systematic violations and structural inversions of ordinary laws of purity and ritual sanctity, through violence, bloodshed and sexual transgression; and both do so with the primary goal of unleashing an awesome source of power that shatters the boundaries of the mundane physical world and social order alike.

Here I would like to adapt but also critically modify some of the ideas of Georges Bataille, who has written some of the most widely

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<sup>67</sup> Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, New York: Viking Press 1962, 290.

<sup>68</sup> "The strategy of metaphorical discourse is aimed not at facilitating communication . . . but rather at challenging and even shattering our sense of reality through reflective redescription" (*A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. Mario J. Valdes, Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1991, 32).

influential work on the concept of transgression. As Bataille suggests, transgression is not a matter of simple hedonism or unrestrained sexual license. Rather, its power lies in the dialectic or play (*le jeu*) between taboo and transgression, sanctity and sacrilege, through which one systematically constructs and then oversteps all laws. It is thus analogous to eroticism. Not a matter of simple nudity, eroticism arises in the dialectic of veiling and unveiling, clothing and striptease, between the creation of sexual taboos and the exhilarating experience of overstepping them. So too, in ecstatic mystical experience or religious rites, such as blood sacrifice, carnivals, etc., one must first create an aura of purity before one can defile it with violence, transgression and the overturning of law. "The prohibition is there to be violated";<sup>69</sup> for it is the experience of over-stepping limits that brings the blissful sense of continuity and communion with the other. As Bataille comments, quoting Marquis de Sade,

It is always a temptation to knock down a barrier. Fear invests [the forbidden act] with an aura of excitement. There is nothing, writes de Sade, that can set bounds to licentiousness. The best way of enlarging and multiplying one's desires is to try to limit them.<sup>70</sup>

For Bataille, the ultimate aim of transgression is not mere sensual pleasure, rather it is the transgression of the very boundaries of the self, the expenditure without hope of return, which shatters the limits of the finite human consciousness and merges it with the boundless continuity of the infinite. It is this experience of transgression and radical expenditure that links eroticism to the ultimate experience of infinite continuity, that of death itself. As Bataille concludes, "Eroticism is assenting to life up to the point of death."<sup>71</sup> This

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<sup>69</sup> Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, San Francisco: City Lights 1986, 64. For other important discussions of transgression, see Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. 2, 89–111; *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1985, and *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2001, 26–75, 133–152, 185–195.

<sup>70</sup> Bataille, *Erotism*, 48.

<sup>71</sup> Bataille, *Erotism*, 1.

fusion of death and sensuality in the act of transgression is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the *tāntrik* image of Chinnamastā — the Goddess who severs her own head and stands upon a copulating couple — or in Crowley's ritual of beheading a goat as it engages in intercourse with a woman.

However, while I find Bataille's comments on transgression generally useful, I would also like to extend and critique them in two ways. First, I want to look more closely at the role of secrecy in all of this: how does concealment function in relation to transgressive ritual practice? There is of course the obvious fact that some of these activities — such as consuming menstrual blood or copulating with goats — are not entirely acceptable by either Hindu or Victorian British social standards and could only take place behind closed doors. But more importantly, I would suggest, secrecy also serves to *intensify and optimize* both the taboo and the transgression, both the laws that forbid such acts in the public world and the titillating power derived from violating them in esoteric ritual. As Michael Taussig nicely put it,

What is essential to realize is how secrecy is intertwined with taboo (and hence transgression) to create a powerful yet invisible presence (indeed, the presence of presence itself) and how essential this is to what we mean by religion.<sup>72</sup>

For secrecy *magnifies* the aura of dangerous mystery that surrounds the prohibition, and so also the explosive power that results from violating it.<sup>73</sup> Secret ritual, we might say, functions like a kind of spiritual slingshot, which is first stretched as tightly as possible and then suddenly released, in order to propel one into ecstatic liberation. Or to use perhaps an even more apt metaphor, the transgressive ritual acts like a form of *socio-nuclear fission*; that is to say, it first *exaggerates*

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<sup>72</sup> Taussig, "Transgression," 355.

<sup>73</sup> "Secrecy (that lies at the very core of power) [is] a potent stimulus to creativity, to what Simmel called the magnification of reality, by means of the sensation that behind the appearance of things there is a deeper, mysterious reality that we may here call the sacred, if not religion" (Taussig, "Transgression," 356); see also Georg Simmel, "Secrecy," in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. Kurt Wolff, New York: Free Press 1950.

and then *shatters* the laws that make up the social organism at its most fundamental atomic level, thereby releasing an explosive burst of energy.

Second, I would also like to suggest some criticisms of Bataille's model of transgression, which is, I think, ultimately inadequate. For what Bataille does not really acknowledge is that transgression is very often tied, not just to ecstatic mystical experience or the liberating bliss of expenditure, but also to real and often asymmetrical relations of power. In particular, Bataille glosses over the fact that transgression does not benefit all individuals equally; for while it may be empowering and liberating for some individuals, it is often oppressive and exploitative for others.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, in his major work on economic and political history, *The Accursed Share*, Bataille seems to have a kind of romantic nostalgia for the good old days of human sacrifice and ritual warfare, before the ecstatic power of transgressive violence was co-opted by modern capitalism. Thus he describes the practice of human sacrifice among the Aztecs as a cruel but divinely motivated search for continuity, which actually frees the victim from his finite, isolated individuality and merges him with the boundless continuity of death:

[I]n his cruel rites, man is *in search of a lost intimacy*. . . . Religion is this long effort and this anguished quest: it is always a matter of detaching from the *real* order, from the poverty of things, and of restoring the *divine* order. . . . The meaning of this profound freedom is given in destruction, whose essence is to consume profitlessly whatever might remain in the progression of useful works. Sacrifice destroys that which it consecrates.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Not unlike the Śākta *tāntrikas*, and not unlike Crowley, Bataille sought a kind of Nietzschean transvaluation of all values, transcending the limited moral boundaries of good and evil. In contrast to the "popular morality" of the servile and the meek, Bataille called for a form of "sovereign" and ecstatic experience, through "intoxication, erotic effusion, laughter, sacrificial effusion [and] poetic effusion." Such sovereign and ecstatic experiences are attained specifically by means of destruction and violence, the shattering of ethical and physical boundaries, with or without the consent of that which is destroyed: "In laughter, sacrifice or . . . eroticism, effusion is obtained through a modification, willing or not, in the order of objects . . . [S]acrifice, in general, destroys beings" (*The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, 94).

<sup>75</sup> Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. 2, 57–58.

In contrast to Bataille, I would emphasize that transgressive acts such as sacrifice and sexual rituals are typically empowering and liberating only for certain individuals, and often oppressive and even exploitative for others. In both the cases of Bengali Tantra and Crowleyian magic, the transgressive rites were in fact quite androcentric, arguably misogynistic and exploitative of the female body. Both, moreover, used esoteric ritual as a means of asserting an essentially patriarchal, elitist social vision, in which the supreme power belongs to the few who possess secret knowledge and dare to overstep the moral boundaries that confine ordinary human beings. In sum, they each exercised a basic double-norm: on the one hand, they asserted the essential divinity of all human beings and even celebrated the divine status of women and lower classes in the realm of secret ritual; yet they also ultimately re-asserted the superior status of a small group of elites, those few initiates who are strong enough to handle this powerful but dangerous esoteric knowledge.

As in the case of any good metaphor, however, this comparison has also highlighted some important differences between these two examples. For this has also been, in effect, an *historical comparison* — that is, an examination of how certain religious ideas are transformed or reinterpreted when they pass from one social and historical setting to another. Perhaps most importantly, Kṛṣṇānanda's secret rituals were, at least in part, an attempt to reassert his own *brāhmanic* status and to reinforce a traditional, class-based social hierarchy in the face of a changing historical context. For Kṛṣṇānanda, strict secrecy was a necessary part of his need to conceal a private realm of transgressive ritual, while protecting his status in mainstream society. Crowley, conversely, proclaimed the destruction of an older religious and social order, which would give birth to a new aeon, with the new Law of Thelema. For Crowley, sexual rituals were the ultimate symbol of his rejection of traditional Christianity morality and his assertion of the godhood of the individual Will. At the same time, Crowley took an apparent delight in revealing secrets, publicly proclaiming his violation of morality and convention. For Crowley, who was always something of an exhibitionist, the ultimate transgression was that of revealing the most terrify-

ing secrets in order to shock the world. In sum, both Kṛṣṇānanda and Crowley employed strikingly similar kinds of esoteric rituals, based on explicit acts of transgression and manipulation of impure bodily substances; yet they did so for very different, apparently opposite, reasons — the one to reinforce the status quo, and the other to demolish it.

*Conclusions and Comparative Comments*

We have not in the least liberated sexuality, though we have . . . carried it to its limits: the limit of consciousness, because it ultimately dictates the only possible reading of our unconscious; the limit of the law, since it seems the sole substance of universal taboos.

Michel Foucault<sup>76</sup>

To conclude, I would like to offer some broader comparative comments on the impact of Tantra and Crowleyian magic on America today. In the years since his death, Crowley's sexual magic has become increasingly influential in American pop-culture and new religious movements; in fact, it has also been increasingly combined with, perhaps hopelessly confused with, Indian Tantric traditions. Most of the popular books now being sold under the label of "Tantra" are really for the most part meldings of Crowleyian sex magic with Indian erotic manuals such as the *Kāma Sūtra* (which in fact has virtually nothing to do with Tantra), usually with a healthy dash of the *Joy of Sex* thrown in.<sup>77</sup> As one enthusiastic neo-Tāntrik guru, Swami Nostradamus Virato, puts it, "the art of Tantra could be called spiritual hedonism, which says eat drink and be merry but with full awareness!"<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, 57. On the point, see also Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. 2, 408.

<sup>77</sup> There is a vast array of such books; see for example: Douglas, *Spiritual Sex*; Christopher S. Hyatt, and Lon Milo Duquette, *Sex Magic, Tantra and Tarot: The Way of the Secret Lover*, New Falcon Pub. 1991; Christopher S. Hyatt and S. Jason Black, *Tantra Without Tears*, New Falcon Pub. 2000; Donald Michael Kraig, Linda Falorio, Tara Nema, *Modern Sex Magick: Secrets of Erotic Spirituality*, St. Paul: Llewellyn Pub. 1998.

<sup>78</sup> Swami Nostradamus Virato, "Tantric Sex: A spiritual Path to Ecstasy," reprinted on the "Church of Tantra" Website (<http://www.tantra.org>).

Indeed, the phrase “American Tantra” is now even a registered trademark, representing a whole line of books, videos and other products through its on-line gift shop.

Thus the category of Tantra is a striking illustration of the strange global circulation of religious ideas, the dialectical play of representations and misrepresentations at work between cultures in our own era of globalization and transnationalism. In the course of its complex journey to the West, Tantra has been progressively transformed from something concerned primarily with secrecy and power to something concerned primarily with sensual pleasure and a liberation of sexuality for a repressive western world. Indeed, even the transgressive power of Tantric ritual itself has now been transformed into a series of commodities that one can purchase on-line — for example, through Tantra.com’s E-sensual’s catalogue, which offers a complete “Tantric Pleasuring Package” for a mere \$198.<sup>79</sup> As such, Tantra has emerged as a new spiritual form remarkably well adapted to the current social-economic situation — the situation that some have described as post-Fordism, post-industrial society, disorganized capitalism or late capitalism.<sup>80</sup> As Bryan S. Turner, Mike Featherstone and others argue, the late 20th century witnessed a significant shift from an earlier mode of capitalism — based on the Protestant ethic of inner-worldly asceticism, hard work, thriftiness and accumulation — to a new form of late capitalism or postindustrial society — based on mass consumption, physical pleasure and hedonistic enjoyment. In consumer culture the body

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<sup>79</sup> <http://www.tantra.com/tantra2/index.html>. On this point, see Urban, “The Cult of Ecstasy,” and *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics and Power*, chapter 6. For “American Tantra™” see Paul Ramana Das’ and Marilena Silbey’s web-site “Third Millennium Magic” (<http://www.3mm.com>).

<sup>80</sup> On the concept of late capitalism, see Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, New York: Basic Books 1973; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham: Duke University Press 1991; Scott Lash and John Urry, *The End of Organized Capitalism*, Cambridge: Polity 1987; William Halal, *The New Capitalism*, New York: Wiley 1986; Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, London: NLB 1975; Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capitalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1985; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, London: Blackwell 1989.

ceases to be an unruly vessel of desire that must be disciplined and subjugated; rather, the body is the ultimate source of gratification and fulfillment. "The new consumptive ethic . . . taken over by the advertising industry celebrates living for the moment, hedonism, self-expression, the body beautiful, progress, freedom from social obligation."<sup>81</sup> With its ideal wedding of spirituality and physical pleasure, divine transcendence and sexual indulgence, these new forms of Tantra/Sex Magick are a striking illustration of what we might call "*the spiritual logic of late capitalism.*"

As such, I would suggest that Crowley and his contemporary are a particularly clear example of what Michel Foucault has called the "repressive hypothesis" — namely, the belief that sexuality has been prudishly repressed by western society and that what is most needed now is an ecstatic liberation of our true sexual nature. Yet in fact, Foucault argues, we have perhaps not so much "liberated" sexuality in any radical new way, but rather simply continued a long history of preoccupation with and discourse about sexuality, which has been described, debated, classified and categorized in endless, titillating detail. "What is peculiar to modern societies," he writes, "is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it ad infinitum, while exploiting it as *the secret.*"<sup>82</sup> Yet what we *have* perhaps done is to push sex to the furthest possible extremes — to extremes of transgression and excess, not resting until we have shattered every law, violated every taboo:

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<sup>81</sup> Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, London: Sage 1990, 114. As Turner comments, "The new leisure consumption and body-beautiful culture stimulate a whole new market around hedonistic personal life-styles, making the body a target of advertising and consumer luxury. . . . In the growth of a consumer society with its emphasis on the athletic/beautiful body we see a major transformation of values from an emphasis on the control of the body for ascetic reasons to the manipulation of the body for aesthetic purposes" (*Regulating Bodies: Essays in Medical Sociology*, London: Routledge 1992, 164–165, 47).

<sup>82</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *An Introduction*, New York: Vintage 1978, 35.



The twentieth century will undoubtedly have discovered the related categories of exhaustion, excess, the limit and transgression — the strange and unyielding form of these irrevocable movements which consume and consummate us.<sup>83</sup>

To close I would like to quote a passage from Leslie Shepherd, who edited Crowley's infamous semi-autobiographical novel, *The Diary of a Drug Fiend*. Crowley and his sexual practices, Shepherd suggests, are perhaps an allegory for modern Western society as a whole, and perhaps foreshadowed the consumptive, destructive, transgressive forces in late capitalist society at the turn of the millennium. "It is just as well that Crowley was ahead of his time; had he been unleashed today," amidst our own obsessions with sex and transgression in contemporary consumer society, "he might have taken the world by storm."<sup>84</sup> Perhaps there is still a good chance that he might.

Ohio State University  
334 Dulles Hall  
230 W. 17th Ave.  
Columbus, OH 43210, USA  
urban.41@osu.edu

HUGH B. URBAN

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<sup>83</sup> Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, 69.

<sup>84</sup> Shepherd, Introduction to *The Diary of a Drug Fiend*, Hyde Park: University Books 1970, vii–viii.

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Vivekānanda and Rāmakṛṣṇa Face to Face: An Essay on the Alterity of a Saint

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## **Vivekānanda and Rāmakṛṣṇa face to face: An essay on the alterity of a saint**

**Carl Olson**

It is well known that Rāmakṛṣṇa, a nineteenth-century Bengali saint (1836–86), was enamored of his disciple Narendranath Datta (later Svāmī Vivekānanda, 1863–1902), organizer of the international Vedānta movement, from the first that the saint of Dakshineswar heard the young man sing devotional songs. Rāmakṛṣṇa became upset when Vivekānanda did not visit him for a period of time, and the Master would ask about his student's whereabouts and welfare. During this early period, Vivekānanda was uncomfortable with the attention given to him by the saint, but he kept returning to visit the Master. Vivekānanda told his brother-disciple and Rāmakṛṣṇa's biographer Svāmī Sāradānanda that after he had finished singing one evening the Master took him to a veranda covered by mat screens. After entering the veranda and closing the door, the two men were isolated and hidden from the view of others. Expecting some kind of private instruction, Vivekānanda was surprised when Rāmakṛṣṇa took hold of his hand, began to cry profusely tears of joy, and told him how he had been waiting for the young man for such a long time. Rāmakṛṣṇa, continuing to weep and rave, stood before Vivekānanda with folded hands in a respectful attitude, and he told the latter that he was an incarnation of the ancient ṛṣi Nara, an aspect of Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu) himself, who had descended to earth in order to remove the misery and suffering of humankind. Vivekānanda's response to the behavior and message of Rāmakṛṣṇa was utter perplexity, and he related that he thought that the Master was completely insane. This strange encounter for Vivekānanda concluded with Rāmakṛṣṇa feeding him sweets, and the former promising to return alone to the madman soon (Sāradānanda 1978–79, 2: 825). A month passed after this embarrassing incident for Narendra, and then he returned once more to visit Rāmakṛṣṇa at Dakshineswar on December 27 and 28, 1881. While sitting on Rāmakṛṣṇa's small bed to which he had been asked to rest, the Master

put his right foot on Narendra's chest, or more vaguely upon his body, according to other accounts, and the visitor began to lose sensory awareness of his body at once, a profound experience that frightened the future disciple (Gupta 1973: 841; Sāradānanda 1978–79, 2: 825).<sup>1</sup>

Vivekānanda's encounter with Rāmakṛṣṇa is a direct experience of the otherness of the Hindu saint that causes the former to feel uncomfortable, mentally disturbed, confused, and, finally, frightened. This early encounter between the two men and Vivekānanda's reaction to the saint can be directly traced to the alterity of Rāmakṛṣṇa. The other is strange and mysterious when initially encountered. And this is part of Vivekānanda's problem. How does one make sense of the other? How does one cope with the alterity of the other when he is a saint? The particular situation of Vivekānanda is more complex because he becomes a devoted disciple of the saint. We can witness a transformation from Vivekānanda's (1986, 4: 356) confession to Sāradānanda about the madman that he encountered to his later assertion in his collected writings that Rāmakṛṣṇa possesses perfect character, and he even acknowledges the Bengali Master as an incarnation of God: 'Ramakrishna Paramahansa is the latest and the most perfect—the concentrated embodiment of knowledge, love, renunciation, catholicity, and the desire to serve mankind' (Vivekānanda 1986, 7: 483). This statement of Vivekānanda appears to contradict his earlier confession about his encounter with Rāmakṛṣṇa to Sāradānanda. There is obviously something that occurred between the initial encounter between the two men and Vivekānanda's later opinion about the saint who becomes his spiritual mentor. According to Narasingha Sil's (1993, 1997a: Chapter 8) interpretation of this conundrum, Vivekānanda decided to project a new image of his Master after he became a celebrity in America.

In order to discern Vivekānanda's initial reaction to the madman, his later transformation into a disciple of the saint, and the image of the saint that he creates for popular consumption, it seems advisable to examine the nature of alterity. A helpful way to approach the phenomenon of otherness is to make judicious use of the phenomenological philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, even though his philosophy is very different than the Neo-Vedānta philosophy of Vivekānanda. It is not the intention of this essay to superimpose a Western philosophical position on an Indian religious phenomenon. Nonetheless, Levinas says some insightful things about otherness that can help us to partially grasp Vivekānanda's early encounter with the otherness of Rāmakṛṣṇa and his later opinion of his spiritual Master.

Within the context of our selected topic, Levinas' philosophy is a better choice than that of Julia Kristeva (1991) because her work on the other equates her or him with a stranger, a person of no importance located outside of the

predominant group. Kristeva's (1982) interesting work on the other sheds a different light on the topic of the other because she connects the other with her notion of abjection. Moreover, Levinas is preferred in this context because his work is less politically slanted and nuanced than that of Kristeva, who has a far left political ax to grind. In a different context, Kristeva's philosophy of otherness would be more appropriate and useful, but it does not fit the context of Vivekānanda and Rāmakṛṣṇa as well as that of Levinas'.

By using some of the insights of Levinas, this paper will attempt to understand how Vivekānanda, who combined an emphasis on spiritual renunciation with social service in his religious message to an international audience, made sense of Rāmakṛṣṇa by using his comments in his collected works. Even though Vivekānanda's relationship with the otherness of Rāmakṛṣṇa is complex, the former does try to put a face on his teacher, and we will see that this face is that of a Neo-Vedāntin sage and ascetic. If we assume that a true face represents the correct identity of a being that derives from a given person and not from externally applied conceptions, it is necessary to investigate the kind of face that Vivekānanda encounters when he looks at the face of Rāmakṛṣṇa. But before this can be accomplished, it will be necessary and helpful to review Levinas' insights into the nature of the face. By following this procedure, we will not only come to appreciate Vivekānanda's conceptualization of his Master but also try to understand why Vivekānanda's conception of Rāmakṛṣṇa is so impersonal at times, why it was so difficult for Vivekānanda to come to grips with the purpose of his Master's incarnational status, and why he attempts to hide the odd mental and personality traits of his Master.

## LEVINAS AND THE OTHER

Levinas thinks that philosophy culminates with alterity or without end, the infinite or wholly other.<sup>2</sup> But before one can understand Levinas' notion of the other, it is necessary to consider briefly his grasp of the self. To be a self is one's primal identity for Levinas. The self is identical in two basic senses: it remains the same even though it may experience change, and it 'hearkens to itself thinking or takes before its depths and is itself an other' (Levinas 1987a: 36). Thus the self is not autonomous and does not constitute itself because it exists as an existent with others within a world. 'The way of the I against the "other" of the world consists in *sojourning*, in *identifying oneself* by existing here *at home with oneself [chez soi]*' (Levinas 1987a: 37; emphasis in original). Therefore, dwelling is the basic mode of maintaining oneself. As the self dwells within the

world, it exists with others, and it establishes contact with others through dialogical interaction. Moreover, for a self to be truly related to itself presupposes its relation to an other.<sup>3</sup> The self entering into relation with the other and having the other return to the self, this twofold movement possesses important consequences for the self because it becomes decentered by the return of alterity (Levinas 1981: 114). In other words, the self is being continually uprooted and decentered by the other. According to his own hagiographical account, something of this nature occurred to Vivekānanda when he initially encountered Rāmakṛṣṇa and after the death of his Master when he developed his own spiritual and philosophical position that evolved into that of Advaita Vedānta or nondualism. The adoption of this philosophical position became the official philosophy of the movement. In fact, the spiritual quest of Rāmakṛṣṇa is presented as culminating in a nondualistic position and not as one among several spiritual experiments of the Master. This official portrait of Rāmakṛṣṇa does not stress his more prominent devotion to the goddess Kālī and his practice of Tantra, which is part of a strategy by Vivekānanda to present an ideal image of the Master that is only partly true and to redefine his otherness to a wider audience that might not understand some of his strange behavior (for a discussion of Rāmakṛṣṇa's devotion to Kālī, see Olson 1990; for a discussion of Rāmakṛṣṇa's connection to Tantra, see Kripal 1995).<sup>4</sup>

Alterity, a radical heterogeneity of the other, is a positive, moral, and ethical force for Levinas because the egoist tendencies of the self are reconditioned when it is exposed to the alterity of the other. How is this possible? Levinas answers,

We recognize the other as resembling us, but exterior to us; the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery. The other's entire being is constituted by its exteriority, or rather its alterity, for exteriority is a property of space and leads the subject back to itself through light (1987a: 76).<sup>5</sup>

Thereby, the self becomes more concerned for the other and tends to it first rather than selfishly caring more for itself. The otherness of Rāmakṛṣṇa had apparently this affect on Vivekānanda because he stopped pursuing a career in law. Another important implication of the other for the self for Levinas is that the former is instrumental in the process of self-understanding by the latter. For Levinas this means that the self achieves true selfhood through its meeting, a dialogical relation, with the other. This is apparently the case with the encounter between Vivekānanda and Rāmakṛṣṇa in spite of the former's assertion that the eternal self is identical to the other and difference is merely due to name and form, which are products of *māyā* (illusion) (Vivekānanda 1986, 2: 275). From a

philosophical perspective, Vivekānanda views relationship nondualistically, but if he had never met Rāmakṛṣṇa, his life would have been very different. From what Vivekānanda says about Rāmakṛṣṇa, his later reflection upon the significance of his Master helped him arrive at his own self-understanding.

The other in itself is not merely one's alter ego for Levinas; it is also what the subject is not because of the very nature of the alterity of the other, which even gives it priority over the subject. The other is mysterious: 'The other as other is not here an object that becomes ours or becomes us; to the contrary, it withdraws into its mystery' (Levinas 1987a: 86). This mysterious aspect of the other is its alterity, which constitutes the essence of the other. Besides the possibility that Rāmakṛṣṇa might be an incarnation, the mysterious aura of the saint is related to his enigmatic behavior that often confused others and even himself.

As the priest of a temple dedicated to the goddess Kālī at Dakshineswar, Rāmakṛṣṇa sat inert before the image of the goddess, at other times he held conversations with the image, he also carried food to the image and begged the goddess to eat, and he cavorted with the image by talking, laughing, singing, and dancing with it. The impure acts that he performed as a priest—like offering flowers to the image of the goddess after touching them to his feet, eating sacramental offerings before giving the food to the goddess, feeding a cat food intended as an offering to the temple image, lying in her bed, and feeding low-caste people at the temple—led witnesses to conclude that he must be insane. Witnesses saw him playing with his own feces, an impure substance, and the fecal matter of other individuals. As a substitute for Śiva's *liṅga*, he worshipped his own penis. Others also witnessed wide mood swings in Rāmakṛṣṇa from sadness and distress, which were often expressed by profuse crying, to acting like a demented person the next moment. Confusion about his own identity haunted Rāmakṛṣṇa because he dressed, talked, and behaved like a woman, he was found sitting in a tree urinating, and he acted like the monkey Hanumān, the general of an army of monkeys and bears in the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, by eating fruits and roots, climbing and living in trees, and creating a tail for himself by tying a piece of cloth around his waist and letting it hang down to resemble a tail.

Not only did others think that he was mad, but Rāmakṛṣṇa himself admitted that he must be crazy because he heard unusual sounds and strange voices, saw weird visions of supernatural beings, heard strange clicking noises in the joints of his legs when he sat to meditate and after concluding his meditation. Even though the saint's personal deity from his childhood was Raghuvīra (a form of Viṣṇu), he often felt separated from his beloved goddess early in his priestly career, which caused him profound mental, emotional, and physical pain because he would throw himself violently on the ground, cut his face by abrasive contact with the ground, cry aloud, and almost stop breathing. Convinced that

life was meaningless and not worth living, he suddenly decided to commit suicide at one point to terminate his emotional and mental anguish, by using the sword of the goddess held by her image in the temple. It was not unusual for Rāmakṛṣṇa to lose track of time, to lose consciousness, to suddenly stand transfixed during a state of *samādhi* (absorption, trance) with his unblinking eyes wide open and his breath barely perceptible, and just as suddenly he returned to a normal state of awareness. Referring to himself, Rāmakṛṣṇa confessed, 'Again, he is like a madman. People notice his ways and actions and think of him as insane' (Gupta 1973: 405). Not only did Rāmakṛṣṇa admit to being insane, he even asked the goddess to drive him mad. This scenario suggests two things: he was aware of his mental state, and he was not in control of his condition. Therefore, Rāmakṛṣṇa's imagined or apparent madness was a major aspect of his otherness.

For Levinas (1987b: 54) the absolutely other is the infinite, which is not a concept but otherness in a radical sense.<sup>6</sup> To think of infinity suggests thinking more than one can think. By thinking it, a person's thought cannot extinguish or exhaust it. In this sense infinity—an absolutely other—is an excess. The idea of infinity is also a desire: 'A thought that thinks more than it thinks is a desire' (Levinas 1987b: 56). Moreover, by means of its own intentionality, infinity aims at what it cannot encompass. One does not have to go far to discover infinity because it is found in one's relationship with the other (Levinas 1987b: 54). Levinas' emphasis on radical alterity suggests that he is concerned with that which overflows thinking or the unthinkable. It is important for him to stress that we not compromise the alterity of the other by thematizing or interiorizing it.

The absolutely other for Rāmakṛṣṇa is the mad goddess Kālī in her form as the Dakṣiṇakālīkā, whose horrific attributes—bloody sword, black skin color, sunken reddish eyes, lolling tongue, sharp fangs, earrings of dead infants, necklace of human skulls, skirt of severed hands, disheveled hair, and sagging breasts—and bizarre actions—killing, laughing, blood drinking, flesh consumption, and sexual aggression—emphasize her radical otherness. The excessive nature of the attributes and actions of Kālī also emphatically stress her infinity, and yet she is the nurturing mother figure for Rāmakṛṣṇa. The malevolent and maternal aspects of the goddess emphasize her paradoxical nature that is difficult for the human mind to grasp or exhaust. It is especially the madness of Kālī that exceeds human thinking. In fact, the world, a product of the *māyā* (creative illusory power) of the goddess, is a madhouse created and governed by a mad, terrible, and frightening goddess, which implies that the world possesses an unreal quality, is ephemeral and actually a mere magic show. It follows necessarily that it is foolish for a person to be attached to the things of the world and rather encourages one to seek the infinite. If individual security and survival in



this madhouse of a world depends on the mad goddess, one must become mad not for the impermanent things of the world but for Kālī alone, which is exactly the advice followed by Rāmakṛṣṇa (for a discussion of his madness, see McDaniel 1989; Olson 1990: 47–67). Although it is risky to become mad for the goddess, one can gain the infinite beyond the lunacy of this world by venturing one's entire being in the quest for the infinite. Within the context of this type of scenario, the madness of Rāmakṛṣṇa, a symbolic mark of his sainthood in the Indian context, can be grasped as a divine gift of the goddess freely given to those who love her and are eager to take a risk.

Although it is true that one enters into relation with the other for Levinas, this relationship is not exactly a true relation because it is not possible to reduce the other into some kind of relationship. Since the other is beyond totality, possesses no place, and cannot be understood as a relation, the other is absolutely exterior to any totalizing intention of thought (Levinas 1990). By stressing the absolute alterity of the other, Levinas wants to indicate its singularity and exteriority in order to protect it from the representation and annulment of its alterity by the Same (*Même*), which tends to confine the other and its autonomy by thinking it. It is wrong to compromise the exteriority of the other because it overflows language, although it leaves a trace of its alterity within language. On the one hand, when Rāmakṛṣṇa seeks for a vision of the goddess, acts like a petulant child in order to be near the mother of the universe, and dresses and behaves like a woman, he is seeking to compromise the otherness of Kālī. On the other hand, Vivekānanda attempts to turn the other into the same in his philosophy by asserting that reality is singular from the perspective of higher knowledge. If there is no I or other because all is one in the singular reality of *brahman*, this implies that there is no I only or only the other alone (Vivekānanda 1986, 2: 418). To differentiate between the other and one's true self leads to separation.

### A TRACE OF A FACE

According to Levinas, the other reveals herself or himself as a face, which is not to be confused with a phenomenal object of perception. The face does not present itself as having a form or as formless (Levinas 1990: 140). When the other presents herself or himself as a face, this face exceeds any conception of the other that I might already possess. This suggests the overflowing nature of the face: 'The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me' (Levinas 1990: 50–51). Not only does the face overflow and present itself, it also expresses itself in language (Levinas 1990:

66). The face, one's true essence, brings one to a 'notion of meaning prior to my *Sinngebung* and thus independent of my initiative and my power' (Levinas 1990: 51). The ability of the face to exceed any conception is evident in the many roles assumed by Rāmakṛṣṇa during his life, that included the roles of child, woman, dancer, teacher, priest, vision seeker, madman, comedian, stranger, and incarnation (for a discussion of these various roles, see Olson 1990). In a sense, these various roles suggest that Rāmakṛṣṇa assumed many faces during his life, and it is difficult to pick one face that represents his essence.

Free from every form and concept and possessing its own meaning for Levinas, a face identifies a being, a manifestation of oneself out of oneself. The face of the other represents an epiphany of a visitation to me. The face visits me naked, a process of denuding, by turning to me free of the Same, without reference to any system, or without disclosing the world (Levinas 1987b: 96, 1990: 74–75). When we encounter the naked face, it calls us and the world into question and urges a response from us to act in a responsible manner, which suggests that the epiphany of the face is ethical for Levinas (1990: 199).<sup>7</sup> During his life, Vivekānanda did respond to the face of Rāmakṛṣṇa in a responsible manner, and he established an international religious movement (some recent and more standard studies of the movement include, French 1974; Isherwood 1959; Jackson 1994; Matchett 1981; Neevel 1976; Pangborn 1976; Schiffman 1989; Schreiner 1978; Stark 1974; Williams 1981).

The face that one encounters is always the face of one's neighbor for Levinas, who is near but never totally present because she or he never completely arrives. Levinas refers to this nearness of two parties as a proximity between oneself and the face of the other which is unique: 'Proximity is quite distinct from every other relationship, and has to be conceived as a responsibility for the other; it might be called humanity, or subjectivity, or self' (1981: 46). The proximity of the other is prior to any subject/object distinction, and it is prior to my experience of the other, a position very similar to that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968).<sup>8</sup> Since the face of the other is never fully present, it cannot be represented.

The face that never fully arrives yet is near is a trace, which is neither present nor absent (Levinas 1981: 94). A trace is an unusual kind of sign. It is not like ordinary signs 'in that it signifies outside of every intention of signaling and outside of every project of which it would be the aim' (Levinas 1986: 356–57). A trace is like a fingerprint left at the scene of a crime. To wipe away the fingerprint means to obliterate the evidence and to indicate that one did not intend to convey any message by the trace that one left. In this sense, a trace not only is inscribed in the fabric of the world in which we live but also tends to

irreparably disturb the order of the cosmos. These characteristics of the face are evident in the life of Rāmakṛṣṇa.

By means of his ideal portrait of Rāmakṛṣṇa, Vivekānanda attempted to obliterate certain incriminating fingerprints left by his Master's behavior. The damaging metaphorical type of fingerprints expunged by Vivekānanda are evident in the Master's treatment of his wife, his penchant for young males, and his practice of Tantra. Sil (1991: 149–50) refers to Rāmakṛṣṇa's mistreatment of his wife by overworking her, disciplining her, and not loving her as much as his young male devotees, even though the saint might not have been fully aware that his behavior could be construed as a form of mistreatment. Rāmakṛṣṇa's preference for young males is called his 'homoeroticism' by Jeffrey Kripal. This so-called 'homoeroticism' at times took the form of naked dancing by Rāmakṛṣṇa surrounded by his male disciples or naked dancing by the boys (Kripal 1995: 231–32). In other incidents Rāmakṛṣṇa worshipped and fondled his own penis as if it was analogous to the *liṅga* of Śiva. In visions he would fondle the penis of a naked ascetic (Kripal 1995: 160–61). Although Rāmakṛṣṇa engaged in various Tantric practices with his teacher the so-called Bhairavī, he was a failed Tāntrika with respect to his conscious awareness and was to reject it later in his life, but he was a genuine Tantric hero by means of his unconscious vision in which he performed cunnilingus upon the goddess, according to Kripal's (1995: 127–29) scholarship, although neither the *Kathāmṛta* of Mahendranāth Gupta nor the *Līlāprasāṅga* of Śāradānanda mention this dream. These are some of the unflattering fingerprints that Vivekānanda expunged from his portrait of the Master. The other created by Vivekānanda was not the figure of flesh and blood because he feared that those not familiar with Rāmakṛṣṇa would misconstrue his otherness. The portrait of Rāmakṛṣṇa given by Vivekānanda is a mere trace of the historical person, a result that fits nicely with Levinas' conception of the face of the other.

This face that is a trace for Levinas, which does not completely come into presence and yet is not totally absent, is without a specific origin. But where does it come from? The face comes from the *beyond* which is beyond the world and any disclosure (Levinas 1986: 354). As the face comes toward beings, it also withdraws from them: 'Its wonder is due to the elsewhere from which it comes and to which it already withdraws' (Levinas 1986: 355). The face, which is abstract, is an advent that 'is an incision in time that does not bleed' (Levinas 1986: 354). The *beyond*, a completely passed absent from which the face arrives, emphasizes the trace-like feature of the face, which one cannot discover by self-introspection. By arriving from the *beyond*, a trace suggests a

unique openness in which the signifyingness of the transcendent does not

nullify the transcendence and make it enter into an immanent *order*; here on the contrary transcendence refuses immanence precisely as the ever bygone transcendence of the transcendent (Levinas 1986: 355; emphasis in original).

Levinas does not conceive of the relationship between the signified and the signification in a trace as a correlation; he rather calls it *unrightness* itself.

During his life, Rāmakṛṣṇa played the role of a stranger, an odd-questioning newcomer who inquires about the fundamental assumptions of a society and tests its system of beliefs. We find, for instance, Rāmakṛṣṇa personally testing the validity of devotional Hinduism, Tantra, Vedānta, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity rather than just accepting what others believed to be true. Rāmakṛṣṇa is a good example of a stranger emerging from within a given cultural group and not necessarily coming from outside of it because throughout his adult life others continually attempted to discern his true identity (Olson 1990: 87–99). Some followers came to the conclusion that the saint was an incarnation, a god-man or coincidence of opposites, who by definition is a stranger to ordinary beings and embodies an aspect of the ‘beyond.’ The Bengali saint’s status as a stranger is acknowledged by Sāradānanda (1978–79, 2: 639) because the saint did not properly belong to any community, nation, or religion. Sāradānanda arrives at this conclusion because of the odd behavior and bizarre antics that marked the saint as different from other people and more akin to a trace.

Levinas (1987b: 106) connects the trace with *illeity*, the origin of alterity by means of which the other withdraws as she or he approaches. Levinas also finds a connection between time and *illeity*: ‘A trace is the insertion of space in time, the point at which the world inclines toward a past and a time. This time is a withdrawal of the other and, consequently, nowise a degradation of duration, which, in memory, is still complete’ (1987b: 105). According to Levinas (1986: 358), a trace is a passing toward a remote pass, an absolute past which unites all times and any future residue that is left in my time. *Illeity* (*il y a*, there is), a position in a trace, suggests the nonthematizable source of the subject because it never joins the subject (Taylor 1987: 204). Neither present nor absent, *illeity* is also irreducibly nonphenomenal because it is the pure trace of a wandering cause inscribed within a person (Levinas 1981: 150). By his connection of a trace with *illeity*, Levinas wants to emphasize the radical singularity of the subject, which is otherwise than being and nonbeing.

Levinas’ contention about withdrawal of the other even as she or he approaches is evident in the life of Rāmakṛṣṇa. While dancing, it was not unusual for him to suddenly stand still, transfixed in *samādhi*, creating an atmosphere, according to participants themselves, of ‘ecstasy of divine love’ or ‘intoxication with the love of God.’ At more conscious moments Rāmakṛṣṇa

behaved like a child and was very happy in the company of children, who he would entertain with songs and games. Gupta, an important witness and biographer known under the pseudonym M, relates that Rāmakṛṣṇa reacted like an anticipant and excited child at the prospect of attending a circus. Acknowledging the importance of assuming the role of a child himself, Rāmakṛṣṇa thought that one must become a child in order to realize the goddess because she protects her children and grants them their desires, suggesting that a child possesses an innate power to transform a dangerous and frightening goddess into a loving mother figure. The goddess also possesses a childish nature by creating, preserving, and destroying the universe, much like a child plays with its toy house (Olson 1990: 19–31). The withdrawal of Rāmakṛṣṇa as the other is also evident when he dons feminine clothing and assumes the demeanor of a woman with such expertise that he is able to fool other people, which is unexpected in a person who is misogynist and fearful of women to the extent that his sexual organ would shrink and retract into his body when he encounters women.

### THE FACE OF RĀMAKRṢṆA

I have attempted thus far to suggest various ways in which Levinas' notion of the face as a trace can shed some light on the enigmatic portrait of Rāmakṛṣṇa in the writings of his biographers and scholarly studies. It is now important to turn to the idealistic portrait created by Vivekānanda. I think that this procedure will help to explain why Vivekānanda depicts his Master in ideal terms and does not give us an intimate personal view of the man with his human faults. What kind of idealized view does Vivekānanda give us of Rāmakṛṣṇa in the former's collected writings that differs from what we have already noted by Eastern and Western scholars and his own biographers?

From Levinas' perspective, the idealized face of Rāmakṛṣṇa created by Vivekānanda is due partially to the abstract nature of the face. According to Vivekānanda's (1986, 4: 356, 5: 388) idealized view of Rāmakṛṣṇa, the latter represents the harmony of knowledge and love, perfect character, a peerless model to be followed by others, a power on earth, and an ancient principle. Even though Rāmakṛṣṇa occupied a human body, Vivekānanda (1986, 4: 183) argues for his perfection because he never cursed or criticized anyone, he could not think evil thoughts, and he could see beyond the evil of the world. Rāmakṛṣṇa's perfection is also evident by his profuse love for humankind that would not allow him to refuse helping anyone (Vivekānanda 1986, 4: 184). To the rhetorical question of the identity of Rāmakṛṣṇa, Vivekānanda answers that he is an

'ancient principle, the embodiment of India that is past, and a foreshadowing of the India that is to be, the bearer of spiritual light unto nations' (1986, 4: 281). Moreover, Vivekānanda refers to Rāmakṛṣṇa as a fortunate power manifested on earth: 'It has come just in time for the regeneration of India, for we forget from time to time the vital power that must always work in India' (1986, 3: 314). In another context, Vivekānanda refers to his Master as a viable force that is 'living even now in his disciples and working in the world' (1986, 5: 269). Terms like 'perfection,' 'principle,' 'force,' and 'power' give us an abstraction and do not give us a glimpse of an actual historical person of flesh and blood.

Within other contexts, Vivekānanda refers to his Master in more personal terms. In an interview with the *Sunday times* of London in 1896, he acknowledges the following:

I am a disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, a perfect Sannyasin whose influence and ideas I fell under. This great Sannyasin never assumed the negative or critical attitude towards other religions, but showed their positive side—how they could be carried into life and practised (Vivekānanda 1986, 5: 190).

In the third volume of his collected works, Vivekānanda refers to Rāmakṛṣṇa as 'my teacher, my master, my hero, my ideal, my God in life' (1986: 312). Vivekānanda (1986, 8: 112, 297) even refers to Rāmakṛṣṇa as a relative and as more dear to him than his own mother and father. In another context, he again calls Rāmakṛṣṇa a hero with national political implications because the saint is someone that Indians can rally around if the nation wants to rise from its subjugation to foreign domination (Vivekānanda 1986, 3: 315). These descriptive terms are a good example of placing Rāmakṛṣṇa into various abstract—although more personal—categories in order to attempt to grasp his significance. This suggests that for Vivekānanda the face of Rāmakṛṣṇa overflows any image or category that it manifests because it exceeds any conceptuality on the part of the disciple to discern it. According to Sil's (1997a: 25) interpretation of Vivekānanda's actions, the attributing of the highest level of renunciation to Rāmakṛṣṇa was part of his agenda to start a spiritual organization.

Vivekānanda agrees with Levinas that the face of Rāmakṛṣṇa did not fully present itself. There are some examples of Vivekānanda (1986, 3: 268, 5: 389) referring to Rāmakṛṣṇa as a strange figure. Even though Rāmakṛṣṇa's face did not fully manifest itself, his face already possessed a meaning prior to any sense that Vivekānanda could derive from it. During Rāmakṛṣṇa's life and after his death, Vivekānanda struggled to learn the significance of Rāmakṛṣṇa's face. The different categories used by Vivekānanda to attempt to discern the nature of his

Master is a good illustration of this search. The face of Rāmakṛṣṇa that predominates for Vivekānanda is the naked face of the *avatāra* (incarnation).

Because the *avatāra* possesses inherent meaning, Vivekānanda struggles to discover its significance, although he would disagree with Levinas that the face of the *avatāra* is free of the Same, whatever way it is defined, because Rāmakṛṣṇa is always grounded in *brahman*, nondual reality. Vivekānanda gives several related reasons for the Rāmakṛṣṇa incarnation. According to Vivekānanda (1986, 6: 183), Rāmakṛṣṇa incarnated himself in India in order to teach the nature of genuine religion to its people. Vivekānanda (1986, 7: 262, 496) audaciously informs others that Rāmakṛṣṇa represents a synthesis of all previous incarnations. This assertion suggests two things: Rāmakṛṣṇa represents an incarnational perfection of the Indian religious tradition, and all previous incarnations are part of a process of evolution that concludes with the Bengali saint. The reason that Rāmakṛṣṇa is greater than Caitanya, for instance, is because his incarnation embodies knowledge, devotion, and love, whereas Caitanya comparatively lacked knowledge (Vivekānanda 1986, 6: 320). Vivekānanda expresses this kind of notion in another way when he claims that Rāmakṛṣṇa's incarnation is intended to rejuvenate 'all branches of art and culture in this country' (1986, 7: 205). In another context, Vivekānanda (1986, 5: 414) thinks that Rāmakṛṣṇa became incarnated in order to teach about the unity that underlies all the religions of the world and the unity behind everything. And if the future welfare of the world depends on improving the condition of women, the incarnation of Rāmakṛṣṇa teaches us to accept women as *gurus*, which for Vivekānanda (1986, 6: 328) helps to explain Rāmakṛṣṇa's acting and dressing as a woman and his message about women as manifestations of the Divine Mother Kālī. Or Rāmakṛṣṇa becomes incarnate for the good of the entire world (Vivekānanda 1986, 6: 266). Vivekānanda's problem discerning the meaning of Rāmakṛṣṇa's incarnation is comprehensible from Levinas' perspective because the face of the other, who never completely arrives, is never totally present. Since the face of the other is not completely present, it cannot be represented or comprehended.

The life and message of Rāmakṛṣṇa are profoundly significant for the entire history of Hinduism, according to Vivekānanda, because it embodies the truth of the Vedas:

The life of Shri Ramakrishna was an extraordinary search-light under whose illumination one is able to really understand the whole scope of Hindu religion. He was the object-lesson of all the theoretical knowledge given in the Shastras (scriptures). He showed by his life what the Rishis and Avatars really wanted to teach. The books were theories, he was the realisation (1986, 5: 53).

Moreover, Rāmakṛṣṇa's message of stages (*avasthās*) and tolerance explains the Vedas, reconciles other sacred texts, and enables one to perceive the truth that forms the basis of all religions. In fact, to accurately understand the Vedas, one must interpret them in the light of Rāmakṛṣṇa's religious experience and teachings (Vivekānanda 1986, 6: 355, 7: 411, 483). If one comprehends Indian sacred texts and Vedānta philosophy, which might appear to a casual or careless viewer as contradictory, in conjunction with the teachings of Rāmakṛṣṇa, one would learn that apparently contradictory scriptural and philosophical statements are intended for individuals at different stages of religious development (Vivekānanda 1986, 7: 412).

The life and message of Rāmakṛṣṇa possess historical and teleological significance for Vivekānanda. Not only does the incarnation of Rāmakṛṣṇa bring peace to different religions around the world, his birth ushered in the Satya Yuga (Age of Truth) (Vivekānanda 1986, 6: 327–28, 335). Being unified by the overflowing love of Rāmakṛṣṇa, this Golden Age is characterized by universal salvation that includes women and the lowest person in the social system (Vivekānanda 1986, 6: 335).

Even though Rāmakṛṣṇa represents the essential key to grasping the essence of the sacred scriptures and diverse philosophical texts of India, the culmination of all previous incarnations of India, and introduces the Satya Yuga into history, Vivekānanda did not advocate preaching this latest and most perfect incarnation outside the confines of India or even emphasize the incarnational status of the Bengali holy man very much within India. In a letter dated March 6, 1895, and addressed to Alasinga, Vivekānanda (1986, 5: 75) gives advice to his monks in India not to preach the person of Rāmakṛṣṇa but to first propagate his ideas. A letter to Alasinga two months later on May 6, 1895, Vivekānanda reiterates the same point, 'Do not press too much the Ramakrishna Avatara' (1986, 5: 81). Why avoid stressing the incarnational beliefs of the movement inspired by Rāmakṛṣṇa? Why not inform others that Rāmakṛṣṇa was an ardent devotee of the goddess Kālī and a practitioner of the radical left-handed variety of Tantra? Why not be honest about his sexual confusion and other personal oddities?

Vivekānanda gives two basic answers to such questions: 'He came to do good to the world; not to trumpet his own name' (1986, 6: 310). When writing to Saradaprasanna Mitra (later Svāmī Trigunatitananda) in India from New York on April 14, 1896, Vivekānanda asserts, 'That Ramakrishna...was God—and all that sort of thing—has no go in countries like this' (1986, 6: 362). In other words, Vivekānanda did not think that the incarnational status of Rāmakṛṣṇa would be readily accepted by a Western audience. Vivekānanda explains further:

They make much flourish and fuss over their science and philosophy. Hence,



unless you first knock to pieces their intellectual conceit through reasoning, scientific argument, and philosophy, you cannot build anything there. Those who finding themselves off their moorings through their utmost intellectual reasoning would approach me in a real spirit of truth-seeking, to them alone, I would speak of Shri Ramakrishna. If, otherwise, I had forthwith spoken of the doctrine of incarnation, they might have said, 'Oh, you do not say anything new—why, we have our Lord Jesus for all that' (1986, 6: 465).<sup>9</sup>

From this quotation, it is obvious that Vivekānanda measures sagaciously his Western audience and astutely anticipates the kind of intellectual and religious response that they would offer. It is also apparent that he is convinced that the personality quarks of the saint would confuse Westerners.

Although Vivekānanda advances several possible reasons for the incarnation of Rāmakṛṣṇa and asserts that this hierophany represents the advent of a new age, the epiphany of the Bengali saint's face in the nineteenth century radically 'upsets all records of history' (1986, 7: 411). This represents the naked face calling the world and its inhabitants into question and urging a response to action in a responsible manner. The advent of his face, however, is not a destructive force, it is rather constructive because Rāmakṛṣṇa aims to teach the religion needed for the present historical period (Vivekānanda 1986, 7: 24). The trace of Rāmakṛṣṇa's face is inscribed in the world, much like a fingerprint on a wine glass, yet it tends to disturb the cosmos.

The encounter of Vivekānanda with the face of his Master helps the former discover his own identity. During a lecture delivered in San Francisco on April 8, 1900, Vivekānanda acknowledges, 'I am the servant of a man who has passed away. I am only the messenger' (1986, 8: 141). And while he lives on the earth, Vivekānanda admits that Rāmakṛṣṇa 'is working through me' (1986, 6: 330). Vivekānanda's religious mission in India and to the West tends to confirm Levinas' assertion that the face of the other calls us to responsibility.

By means of his own written testimony, Vivekānanda also suggests that he agrees with the spirit of Levinas' opinion about the significance of the face. Vivekānanda writes, 'We are our faces, but can see only a reflection, never the real thing' (1986, 7: 17). Thus our own face and that of the other is never completely present because it never totally arrives into our presence. As the face—our own or that of the other—comes into view, it withdraws from us. As we have noted, the genuine face of Rāmakṛṣṇa is a real problem for Vivekānanda to discern.

Vivekānanda's search for the face of Rāmakṛṣṇa is an especially difficult problem because of the belief that the subject represents a god-man. It is as if Vivekānanda could have easily put a face on the human being and another on the

divine being. Due to the religious regimen and life of Rāmakṛṣṇa, he acknowledges that the 'man was all dead and only God remained' (Vivekānanda 1986, 7: 85). It is impossible to put a personal face on a dead man or a God. Rāmakṛṣṇa is both a unique and mysterious person from Vivekānanda's perspective: 'He only knows what he himself really was; his frame was a human one only, but everything else about him was entirely different from others' (1986, 5: 389). This acknowledgment by Vivekānanda does not suggest that he is moving in the direction of emphasizing difference in his philosophy or the complete alterity of the other. It does, however, suggest that Rāmakṛṣṇa is a unique person in his opinion and that he wants to protect the alterity of the Bengali saint. Vivekānanda seems to know that he cannot reduce the alterity of Rāmakṛṣṇa into a relationship that he could measure.

### OTHERNESS AND PLAY

From one perspective, the attempt of Vivekānanda to redefine the otherness of Rāmakṛṣṇa from the position of his Advaita Vedānta philosophy, which was also a process of self-discovery for him, produced an other that did not have much relation to the saint of flesh and blood. I am inclined to agree with David Kinsley when he states that 'play participates in and expresses otherness' (1979: x). This is an aspect of alterity that is neglected by both Levinas and Vivekānanda, although the latter does recall his relationship with Rāmakṛṣṇa as being playful:

We spent much time there in play and merriment also. At those times the Master too joined us as far as possible and added to our happiness. There we ran about, climbed trees, and sitting in the swing formed by the Madhavi creeper as strong as cable, swung freely and merrily; and sometimes we picnicked, cooking our meals ourselves (Sāradānanda 1978–79, 2: 801).

Vivekānanda's failure to stress the play element in Rāmakṛṣṇa's life is unfortunate because he would have been able to give others a more accurate portrait of his Master if he had concentrated on this aspect of the life of Rāmakṛṣṇa. The way that play can elucidate the otherness of Rāmakṛṣṇa is evident with respect to his humor and visions, which are two features that we have not fully developed thus far. But before we examine these features of his playfulness and otherness, we need to briefly review the nature of play.

Needless to say, the element of play assumes a very significant part in the

history of devotional Hinduism. Play is the opposite of work because the latter is a purposeful activity intended to produce a product, a result, wealth, or a combination of these (for a full discussion of the play element within the context of Rāmakṛṣṇa's life, see Olson 1990: 19–31). Work tends to be a serious activity that is directly connected to the laws of cause and effect, involvement in the world, and the cycle of time and associated with need and desire. Because of the necessity for most people to work in order to economically support themselves and others, it is necessary for them to submit themselves to the constraints of time, which suggests that time possesses a beginning and an end. By subjecting themselves to the burden of work and the associated limitations of time, people place themselves by necessity into a condition of bondage. Thus the need to work and its connection to the limitations of time in order to achieve some result is considered a shortcoming for human beings.

In comparison to work, play possesses a diametrically opposite character because it is an unmotivated, free, unconditioned, unpredictable, purposeless, spontaneous, and aimless display. Play, an effortless activity, creates neither products nor wealth because it is an unproductive endeavor that is a pure waste of time, energy, and skill. Although they are devoid of any selfish motives, purpose, or compulsion to create the cosmos, it is by means of play (*līlā*) that the gods or god, depending on the text consulted, create the world without responsibility or moral consequences for what they have created by means of their playful actions. Therefore, the cosmos is a mere toy or plaything of the divine beings. For deities play is similar to recreation, an activity without effort or purpose. By engaging in play like the Hindu gods, we can leave our luster-lacking, boring, uninspiring world and escape to a magical realm where we can dance, sing, and laugh to our utter delight. To revel in the superfluous world of play is to be free from the limitations of work and time.

Within the playful world of Rāmakṛṣṇa, play assumed the form of humor, although this is certainly not the only aspect of play in the life of the Hindu saint. According to Rāmakṛṣṇa, humor and its concomitant laughter originated with the goddess Kālī, who bestowed it upon human beings as a gratuitous gift. Since gifts in Indian culture represented a form of sharing, it was permissible for one to share humor and laugh with Kālī, which was exactly what Rāmakṛṣṇa did. After rising from the Gaṅgā River, the goddess conversed with Rāmakṛṣṇa, according to his testimony, and mutually shared a laugh, although the saint does not inform us about the nature of the humor. He does admit, however, that his encounter and shared laughter was a form of play (Gupta 1973: 830).

Rāmakṛṣṇa's sense of humor was often self-directed or focused on incongruous persons or situations. After a trick was played on him, the saint demonstrated the ability to laugh at the situation. An actress and devotee of the saint

was denied access to him, for instance, because of the connection in the common imagination between women of her profession and prostitutes. With some assistance the actress disguised herself as a European male and gained admittance to the saint, who laughed when he learned of her true identity and enjoyed retelling this episode about how he was fooled to others (Isherwood 1959: 299). This is a good example of the power of humor to function as a cohesive force, even though it is also able to create distance. The relational aspect of Rāmakṛṣṇa's humor, which was often rather bawdy, served as a force to unite others in a mutual, filial bond of companionship, often functioned to give people a break from their ordinary problems, and enabled them to enjoy something impractical and frivolous. The distance created by humor enables one to take an insightful look at life because one is disengaged from it and gets a better perspective on things, people, and events. The potential for gaining insight is not always realized because humor can be misused in a cruel and malicious way or it can lead one toward arrogance, pride, and dearth of empathy.

Rāmakṛṣṇa was able to avoid these dangers of humor because his humor was grounded in his faith in the goddess, which enabled him to avoid superficiality, despair, dogmatism, shortage of creativity, and a lack of spontaneity. Rāmakṛṣṇa told a humorous anecdote about a man who witnessed the collapse of a house, but his educated friend did not believe him because he could not verify the man's story by reading the local newspaper and concluded that the alleged account must be false (Gupta 1973: 864). Rāmakṛṣṇa's anecdote suggests the following conclusion: if humor is firmly based in faith, it can give one the courage to take a risk. If human existence is characterized by absurdity, anxiety, suffering, failure, and evil, Rāmakṛṣṇa's humor treats these features in a playful manner, which suggests that his humor refuses to surrender to these negative forces of life and refuses to accept these bleak aspects of human existence with ultimate seriousness. Rāmakṛṣṇa told, for instance, a joke comparing a world renouncer, who was attached to worldly things, to a beautiful woman with bad odor, which renders her beauty useless (Gupta 1973: 442). By moving away from the danger inherent within humor, Rāmakṛṣṇa's humor takes others in the direction of harmony and unity, and it attempts to transform the world from a realm of bondage into a sphere of mirth and liberation. To achieve this kind of liberation involves the ability to laugh at oneself, others, and the folly of the world. Rāmakṛṣṇa made fun of himself, for instance, when he told the story of a naked person living within his body. When this mysterious person appeared to the saint in visions, his indigestion became worse. After one vision, Rāmakṛṣṇa said that he had an acute attack of diarrhea which caused all his visions to pass out through his bowels (Gupta 1973: 813). If it is stated that the humor of Rāmakṛṣṇa is directly involved in the essence of play, something similar can be

affirmed for his visions.

Although the Bengali saint does not tell us what his reaction was to the vision, he did recount that he saw a comely, pregnant woman rise from the Gaṅgā River and give birth to a child that she began to nurse. In this vision the beautiful woman suddenly transformed herself into an old, horrible hag who shoved the little infant into her mouth, cruelly crushed it with her teeth, and, finally, swallowed the unfortunate victim. After consuming her own infant, the terrifying creature disappeared into the sacred waters (Gupta 1973: 870). In another vision, Rāmakṛṣṇa related an ecstatic experience of nondual consciousness when he saw various kinds of foods and filth around that were touched by his soul in the form of a flame which convinced him that all these pure and impure substances represented a single consciousness (Gupta 1973: 282). Such visions were an inward sign of his holiness, and they were personal and self-validating. In some of his visions, Rāmakṛṣṇa received advice, messages, and cures. They not only motivated his behavior but also solidified his personal identity, served as a manifestation of his sainthood, reinforced his charismatic power, and enhanced the cohesiveness of his fellowship. In a more obviously playful vision, Rāmakṛṣṇa saw the goddess as a young, naked Muslim girl, and they walked together, telling each other jokes, playing, and enjoying each others company (Gupta 1973: 175). Thus Rāmakṛṣṇa's visions were a visual form of play, which gave him mental lucidity and certainty. And as a gift from the goddess, his visions dissolved the distance and eradicated any other spatial barriers between the saint and his goddess.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Even though we have made an attempt to demonstrate that Levinas' philosophical reflections on the nature of the face help us to understand Vivekānanda's grasp of his Master, this does not suggest that these thinkers are in total agreement about the nature of the face. Both thinkers do agree, however, that the face does not present itself totally because it exceeds our ability to conceptualize it and even exceeds the very image that it evokes for us. Already possessing meaning prior to any sense that one can attribute to it, the face contains its own meaning, which one can struggle to comprehend like Vivekānanda did with the face of his Master. These thinkers also agree that the face, a naked epiphany, visits one, calls everything into question, and urges a reasonable and responsible response from us. Even though the face comes to visit us, this does not necessarily involve its complete presence before us because as it arrives it also

withdraws from us, a feature that makes total representation of the face impossible for us. Vivekānanda agrees with Levinas, even though he does not state it unequivocally but implies it, that the face is a trace that is inscribed into the world and tends to disturb it.

Although our thinkers share some ideas about the importance and nature of the face, it is not possible to confuse Vivekānanda as a postmodern thinker. Vivekānanda would agree with Levinas that the face comes from the beyond, but the former wants to insist that the face has a specific origin because it is grounded in *brahman*. Thus the face of the other cannot be beyond totality for Vivekānanda. The face does have a place, even though it might be rather nebulous for Vivekānanda within the world, and we can enter into a relation with it because oneself and the face of the other are grounded in an ultimate reality that is defined as being, consciousness, and bliss (*saccidānanda*). The face of the other is not totally exterior to oneself for Vivekānanda because it is identical to the essence of oneself. Thus Vivekānanda cannot maintain the absolute alterity—its singularity and exteriority—of the face of the other. Unlike the face of Levinas, the face conceived by Vivekānanda loses its alterity in the monism of Advaita Vedānta with the realization that one's self (*ātman*) is identical with the nondual *brahman*. Levinas wants to protect the alterity of the face of the other from this kind of monistic unity that is the result of a unitive experience. The exteriority of the face of the other might be compromised by Vivekānanda from Levinas' philosophical position, but the former is convinced that the face of the other, or in this case Rāmakṛṣṇa, leaves a trace of its alterity within language as evident by his writings.

An important aspect of the otherness neglected by Vivekānanda and Levinas is that of play, a manifestation of the *citsakti* (creative, conscious, feminine power) of the goddess. The Bengali saint's ability to assume many roles during his life contributed to a game devoted to guessing his true identity, a mode of play that tended to confound, amaze, and dazzle other participants in the game. As an incarnation of the goddess, Rāmakṛṣṇa, an embodiment of the divine player, pulled others into his game, a joyful and purposeless activity, to sing and dance intoxicated with the love of the divine in an ecstatic frenzy of joyful celebration that gave the participants a foretaste of heavenly bliss.

### Notes

1. Sometimes Rāmakṛṣṇa claims that he used a hand or he says that he just touched him (Gupta 1973: 231, 717, 770).

2. In a long essay entitled 'Violence and metaphysics,' Jacques Derrida (1978: 81–82) raises a question about the legitimacy of using the term 'philosophy' to refer to the work

of Levinas because his work does not have its origin within any Greek source, horizon, conceptuality, or language, a basic necessity for a body of writings to be called philosophical. Such a position by Derrida and his criticism of Levinas seem to suggest his own provincialism because, if his claim is accepted, there is also no such thing as philosophy in Eastern cultures.

3. Levinas wants to distance himself from Martin Heidegger and his emphasis on the *Mitsein* of Dasein because he does not think that the other can be explained in terms of Being like Heidegger prefers to do in his work. Since Dasein is equally related to the world and the other, the *Mitsein* is equiprimordial with *In-der-Welt-Sein* (Being-in-the-world). Unrelated to the other as such, Dasein understands the Being of the other not by differing itself from the other but by being with the other and the way it is. Therefore, Dasein is always related to the way of Being of the other. Heidegger writes, 'The world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of Dasein is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]. Being-in is *Being-with* Others. Their Being-in-themselves within-the-world is *Dasein-with* [*Mit-dasein*]' (1962: 155; emphasis in original).

4. Jeffrey Kripal's book has been criticized by those disagreeing with his interpretation of Rāmakṛṣṇa. Three excellent examples of such works are Svāmī Ātmajñānānanda (1997), Gerald Larson (1997), and Narasingha Sil (1997b). For a less impassioned and biased view of Kripal's book, see Olson (1997).

5. Earlier in the text, Levinas defines light by stating that 'Light is that through which something is other than myself, but already as if it came from me' (1987a: 64). In Heidegger's early work, Dasein (There-being) is itself the lighting process (*Lichtung*), a term that also embodies the notion of clearing or an opening within a forest. Without its luminosity, Dasein would be something else and not what it is because it would not be able to disclose itself. For Heidegger (1962: 171) there is a close relationship between the luminosity of Dasein and the disclosedness of the world that constitutes Dasein's Being-in-the-world. Moreover, the disclosedness of the world is also the lighting up of Being. In Heidegger's later works, it is language, as an event (*Ereignis*), that gives man 'the possibility of standing in the openness of the existent' (1949: 287).

6. Derrida criticizes Levinas: 'If one thinks, as Levinas does, that positive Infinity tolerates, or even requires, infinite alterity, then one must renounce all language, and first of all the words of *infinite* and *other*' (1978: 114; emphasis in original). Levinas does not aim at the destruction of language but seeks to affirm the alterity of the other and emphasize that language possesses no limits (on these points, see Ziarek 1989). Derrida (1978: 126) also claims that Levinas cannot speak of the infinitely other without also affirming the Same, a criticism that is not necessarily true.

7. The epiphany of the face is a 'breaking through,' a form that delimits it (Levinas 1990: 197–98). Face, a transhistorical dimension that overflows the finite, is beyond any order of essences and inaccessible to conceptualization. What Levinas means is akin to what Heidegger refers to as *Ereignis*, an event that discloses what is nearest and most intimate to us in terms of a primordial identity or letting belong together of Being and thought. *Ereignis* makes possible a clearing for the manifestation of anything as present or absent, generates language, and allows truth to appear (*aletheia*). Heidegger (1971: 96)

refers to it as a leap in the abyss.

8. Merleau-Ponty uses the term 'ineinander' to describe proximity, which suggests that we are literally in one another because one is the Other's other by entering into the articulation of her or his life. The face of the Other, much like a mirror manifests my own face, directly presents the Other, forming a single image in which we are both involved (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 82–83).

9. Svāmī Nikhilānanda refers to a disagreement between Vivekānanda and other disciples about the type of religiosity that the group should emphasize. Some disciples wanted to follow the advice of Rāmakṛṣṇa himself to intensify love of their deity by means of prayer and meditation. These disciples were convinced that Vivekānanda's activities in the West were disharmonious with the teachings of the Master. Vivekānanda was also accused of preaching not the person of Rāmakṛṣṇa in the West but only himself. Vivekānanda responded by saying that when people come to understand him then they will understand the Master (Nikhilānanda 1987: 244). Not only did Vivekānanda not preach about Rāmakṛṣṇa in the West, he also refrained from discussing Kālī, even though he acknowledged that he was her devotee. According to Nikhilānanda's (1987: 47) biography, Vivekānanda did not think that Kālī would be understood in the West and that modern religious seekers can find what they need in the Upaniṣads.

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CARL OLSON is Professor of Religious Studies at Allegheny College.

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## “WEDDING OF TWO SOULS”

### Same-Sex Marriage and Hindu Traditions

Ruth Vanita

In 2000, I married my partner, a Jewish American woman, in New York with Jewish and Hindu ceremonies. The following month we held a wedding reception in New Delhi. The rabbi who conducted the Jewish ceremony said that we were married “in the eyes of God and of all enlightened people.” Whether or not a government recognizes same-sex marriage, and however a government chooses to define marriage, no government can tell people whom to love nor can it exert exclusive control over marriage or people’s understanding of marriage.

When I was educated at Delhi University in the 1970s and throughout the period that I taught there, from 1976 to 1996, same-sex love was almost never mentioned in the academy. From 1978 to 1990, I was active in the women’s movement, as one of the founding editors of *Manushi* magazine and an activist in the women’s organization that produced it (*manushi* means female human being). I found that a similar silence prevailed then in feminist politics as well, both left-wing and right-wing. Many of the leading activists in women’s groups were lesbians, but they never mentioned or discussed this in activist forums.

I, too, kept my private and public personae almost entirely separate. However, I published some essays and wrote a PhD dissertation on same-sex relationships represented in English literary texts.<sup>1</sup> My colleagues at Delhi University were appreciative of this work. For more than two decades, I also collected every reference to homosexuality in India that I came across in books, magazines, and newspapers. In 1995, historian Saleem Kidwai (who had been making a similar collection) and I began to work on what became the book *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History*.<sup>2</sup> This col-

<sup>1</sup> My dissertation was rewritten and published as *Sappho and the Virgin Mary: Same-Sex Love and the English Literary Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai, eds., *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (New York: Palgrave, 2000).

lection of translations from texts in fifteen Indian languages composed over a period of more than two thousand years, along with editorial essays contextualizing and analyzing them, exposes as false the myth that same-sex desire is unknown in traditional Indian culture. Kidwai and I conclusively demonstrated that same-sex love and romantic friendship flourished in ancient and medieval India in various forms, without any extended history of persecution. We also found textual evidence of marriage-like unions, an area that I further explore in my forthcoming book, *Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriage and Its Antecedents in India and the West*.<sup>3</sup>

This book arises from three extraordinary moments and sets of events. It may be said to have had its genesis in June 1980, when I read newspaper reports of a joint suicide attempt by two young women—Mallika, twenty, and Lalithambika, seventeen—in Kerala, south India, who left behind letters stating that they could not bear to be separated from each other. In subsequent decades there were a series of such joint suicides and also several female-female weddings in different parts of India. Of the same-sex weddings, that between two policewomen, Leela Namdeo and Urmila Srivastava, in 1988, received the most attention and is discussed in this article. The second moment was in 1996, when I first read the amazing fourteenth-century sacred narrative of the birth of a heroic child, Bhagiratha, to two women who make love with divine blessing. In subsequent years I discovered more versions of this narrative and have continued to ponder its meaning. The third is the present moment, in 2004, when two countries (the Netherlands and Belgium) have recognized same-sex marriage and a third, Canada, is on the verge of doing so, while the United States is being galvanized by the Massachusetts Supreme Court decision that requires the state to recognize same-sex marriage.

These events in vastly different cultures, times, and places nevertheless have something in common—in different ways they point to the possibility of same-sex love and commitment being sanctified. Death, parenthood, and marriage—each is a rite of passage, and each may also, in the right circumstances, become, in Shakespeare's words to his male beloved, the "perfect ceremony of love's rite."

Same-sex relationships have been a subject of debate for centuries in Indian texts. Michael Sweet and Leonard Zwilling, and Kidwai and I have demonstrated that sexual identities were constructed in ancient and medieval Indian texts, and that Foucault and his followers are wrong about the first such construction having occurred in modern Euro-America.<sup>4</sup> In the present article, I focus on ideas of same-sex union in Indian, especially Hindu, culture.

<sup>3</sup> Ruth Vanita, *Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriage and Its Antecedents in India and the West* (New Delhi: Penguin, forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> See Michael J. Sweet and Leonard Zwilling, "First Medicalization: The Taxonomy and Etiology of Queerness in Classical Indian Medicine," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3, no. 4 (1993):

The cultures that have come to be called Hindu (a term first used by west Asian Muslims to distinguish non-Muslim inhabitants of the subcontinent) constitute one of the oldest living religions in the world. They foster a very wide range of philosophy and practice, ranging from monotheism, polytheism, and what nineteenth-century German Indologist Max Müller termed "henotheism" (choosing one deity for special worship even while acknowledging the divinity of others), to animism and even agnosticism or atheism. In Hindu texts and traditions, written and oral, there is a god and a story or variation of a story for practically every activity, inclination, and way of life. Despite this diversity, one can tentatively identify certain ideas broadly accepted in mainstream Hinduism and by most Hindus today. These include the doctrine of rebirth, the desirability of adhering to dharma, however defined, and the idea that the universe and everything in it partake of the divine. Though some texts today, like the Bhagavad Gita and versions of the Ramayana, are relatively more widely read and recited than others, and some, like the Vedas, are considered by many Hindus to be more sacred than others, the hierarchy of texts differs widely from one Hindu community to another. Hinduism has well over a thousand years' history of written commentary and debate on sacred texts, but certain texts are more important to certain Hindu traditions than others and are differently interpreted by them. No one text can be used to entirely invalidate the authority of others, nor is there one priestly hierarchy that can dictate to all others.

As many historians have shown, Indian attitudes toward sex and love were radically transformed during the colonial era. Indian nationalists imbibed Victorian ideals of heterosexual monogamy and disowned anything in indigenous traditions that seemed to flout those ideals.<sup>5</sup> The distaste for sex that was one strand in premodern Hindu thinking became hegemonic and marginalized all the other, more pleasure-oriented strands of thinking. More specifically, British rulers imported a virulent homophobia into India and other countries they colonized. They enshrined it in section 377 of the Indian Penal Code,

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590–607; Leonard Zwilling and Michael J. Sweet, "'Like a City Ablaze': The Third Sex and the Creation of Sexuality in Jain Religious Literature," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6, no. 3 (1996): 359–84; Vanita and Kidwai's preface to *Same-Sex Love in India*, as well as Ruth Vanita's "Introduction: Ancient Indian Materials" and "Introduction: Medieval Materials in the Sanskrit Tradition"; and Ruth Vanita, "Hinduism and Homosexuality," in "Traditional Views and Modern Responses to Homosexuality in the World Religions," ed. Gabriel Blau (Bard College God and Sexuality Project). See also Robert P. Goldman, "Transsexualism, Gender, and Anxiety in Traditional India," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 3 (1993): 374–401; and Amara Das Wilhelm, *Tritiya-Prakriti: People of the Third Sex; Understanding Homosexuality, Transgender Identity, and Intersex Conditions through Hinduism* (Philadelphia: Xlibris, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983). See also "Introduction to Modern Indian Materials," in Vanita and Kidwai, *Same-Sex Love in India*, 191–217, for more details.

1860, which criminalizes intercourse “against the order of nature.” Although it has been used largely to harass men, it has also occasionally been used to threaten women and casts all homosexual relations under the cloud of illegality. In 1994 the ABVA (AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan [Anti-AIDS Discrimination Campaign]) filed a petition in the Delhi high court, challenging this law as unconstitutional. The case was dismissed a couple of years ago, because the lawyer on record was absent; last year, the Naz Foundation filed another petition in the same court challenging the same law. The court is still considering whether to admit this case.

It was in the context of modern homophobia that the word *homosexuality* was introduced into India, and this word emphasizes sex rather than love. The current international debate on same-sex marriage is highlighting the important fact that marriage, whether cross-sex or same-sex, is based on love, commitment, and companionship, of which sexual desire is only one dimension. My argument is that, in the past two decades, some couples in India, most of them female, have, by getting married to each other, compelled their communities to consider same-sex relationships in terms of love and commitment rather than simply in terms of sex.

In Hinduism, gender is often perceived simultaneously as very powerful and as irrelevant. This paradox makes possible the enforcement of gendered social roles along with the perception of spiritual nondifference. This is one dimension of a larger pattern Ashis Nandy describes: “The greater Sanskritic culture, while institutionally one of the most rigid, has always been ideologically one of the most tolerant.”<sup>6</sup> This is partly because Hindu texts and traditions, like Hindu gods and goddesses, are multiple and multidimensional, and this is reflected in approaches to sexuality.

Whereas Hindu ascetic traditions view all sexual desire as problematic and justifiable only for procreation, many other canonical texts represent Kama, god of love and desire, as a universal principle of attraction, present from the moment of creation and causing all movement and change. Contrary to texts that identify procreation as the sole aim of sexual activity, the fourth-century Kamasutra, also a sacred text, while giving procreation due importance, also emphasizes pleasure and joy as aims of intercourse and states that sexual desire “finds its finality in itself” (1.2.12).<sup>7</sup>

The Kamasutra mentions that two men friends who are well-wishers of each other and have complete trust in each other may mutually unite. The word *parigraha* is used (2.9.36), which some scholars translate as “marry” and

<sup>6</sup> Ashis Nandy, *Alternative Sciences: Creativity and Authenticity in Two Indian Scientists* (1980; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 120–21.

<sup>7</sup> Alain Danielou, trans., *The Complete Kāma Sūtra* (Rochester, VT: Park Street, 1994). This is the translation quoted in the main text throughout.

others as "embrace."<sup>8</sup> Classifying humans into men (who desire women), women (who desire men), and those who prefer the same sex, the *Kamasutra* also notes that individuals may engage in different types of sexual activity at different times: "It is by taking into account the country, the period, custom, the injunctions of the sacred texts, as well as one's own tastes, that one decides whether or not to practice these kinds of sexual relations. Practiced according to his fantasy and in secret, who can know who, when, how, and why he does it?" (2.9.44–45).<sup>9</sup>

My argument is that whereas prescriptive texts, such as legal and medical texts, tend to view same-sex relations through the lens of purity and pollution, regarding them as mildly distasteful, and prescribe minor penalties for them, narrative texts, placing sexual relations in emotional contexts, take a much more complex and nuanced view. These texts depict same-sex unions that are marriagelike; the scattered same-sex marriages that have taken place in India since the 1980s are a modern rewriting of those premodern ideas.

### Same-Sex Marriage in Recent Years

The most famous same-sex marriage in modern India is probably that of Leela Namdeo and Urmila Srivastava. In early 1988, Indian newspapers nationwide reported that these two policewomen had married each other in a Hindu ceremony in a small town in central India. The police suspended them from their jobs, but family and friends supported them. Since then, the Indian media have reported a series of marriages, in different parts of the country, between young women, almost all Hindus. Most of them are lower-middle-class, from small towns, and not primarily English-speaking, although most have some education and several are employed. None of them are connected to women's or lesbian/gay movements.

Since 1980 the press has also reported a series of joint suicides by couples, mostly women from backgrounds similar to those of the women who marry. In the letters they left behind, these couples state that they prefer union in death to separation.<sup>10</sup> Joint suicides are not unique to same-sex couples. Many cross-

<sup>8</sup> Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar translate *parigraha* as "do this service for one another." Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar, trans., *Kamasutra/Vatsyayana Mallanaga* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 2.9.36. An extended discussion of the connotations of this term in the *Kamasutra* appears in my forthcoming book, *Love's Rite*.

<sup>9</sup> For a more detailed analysis of homoeroticism in the *Kamasutra*, see my essay "Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra*," in Vanita and Kidwai, *Same-Sex Love in India*, 46–53.

<sup>10</sup> One journalist cataloged fifteen joint same-sex suicides in the state of Kerala alone between 1992 and 2000, of which thirteen were by women and two by men. The suicides were prompted mostly by the impending forced marriage of one partner. The women, aged between sixteen and twenty-two, included peasants, factory workers, and students. I also have evidence of suicides from many other parts of India.



sex couples in India also commit suicide together when hostile families refuse them permission to marry.

In contrast to the majority of homosexually or bisexually inclined people in India, who engage in secret same-sex liaisons while married to an opposite-sex partner, these couples tried, through their weddings and/or suicides, to make their love visible in widely understood cultural terms. By marrying and/or dying together, they proclaimed that they were in love, and this proclamation was no different from similar proclamations by cross-sex lovers. As distinct from the modern United States, where same-sex love and marriage are seen as opposed to cross-sex love and marriage, in India all romantic love and marriage based upon it are seen as opposed to family-arranged marriage. Intense love and desire for union are understood as arising from similar causes, whoever the partners may be. This is indicated by comments on same-sex marriage made by onlookers, priests, and others.

For example, a journalist who visited Leela and Urmila in the latter's village, where the women were staying with Urmila's family, spoke with neighbors and relatives. A married woman named Sushila Bhawasar, who was a neighbor and a village schoolteacher, said to the journalist, "After all, what is marriage? It is a wedding of two souls. Where in the scriptures is it said that it has to be between a man and a woman?"<sup>11</sup> Sushila's view of marriage as a union of two souls would be generally accepted by most Hindus in India and also by many Christians in the West. However, not all would agree with her logical conclusion that, because the soul is not gendered, a marriage between two men or two women is permissible. During the late-1990s controversy in India and among Indians in the United States around the depiction of lesbian relations in the film *Fire*, right-wing Hindu organizations claimed that same-sex relations were unknown in ancient Hindu India, and were imported into the country by west Asian Muslims and European Christians, a myth still widely believed by many Indians.<sup>12</sup> Most middle-class Indians avoid discussing sex in "polite" forums, including the classroom. The only respectable space for celebrating sex publicly is a wedding.

Like traditional Christian marriage and unlike Muslim marriage, traditional Hindu marriage is a sacrament and is not dissoluble. But, like modern Christian marriage, modern Hindu marriage, regulated by a 1955 law, is both a sacrament and a contract, and it is dissoluble. Most ancient Hindu texts rec-

<sup>11</sup> Sushila Bhawasar, quoted in Chinu Panchal, "'Wedded' Woman Cops to Challenge Sack," *Times of India*, February 23, 1988.

<sup>12</sup> *Fire*, DVD, directed by Deepa Mehta (1996; New Yorker Films, 2000). For accounts of the controversy, see Geeta Patel, "On Fire: Sexuality and Its Incitements," and Monica Bachmann, "After the Fire," in *Queering India: Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society*, ed. Ruth Vanita (New York: Routledge, 2002), 222–33 and 234–44, respectively.

ognize eight types of marriage.<sup>13</sup> One of them is the *gandharva vivaha*, or marriage by mutual consent; it requires no parental consent, no ritual, no officiant, and no witnesses. Although some ancient legal texts disapprove of this type of marriage, ancient and medieval narrative literature, both sacred and secular, often describes it nonjudgmentally or even celebrates it as the best form of marriage because it is based on choice.

One article on the marriage of Leela and Urmila described their union as a *gandharva vivaha*.<sup>14</sup> Most Indians would readily understand this Sanskrit term as the equivalent of what today in Indian English is called a "love-marriage," as distinct from the more conventional and more prevalent family-arranged marriage. The question is, Whose consent is required besides that of the two individuals? Ancient Hindu law books consider the best type of marriage to be one in which the two families arrange the wedding, a priest performs the rites, and the father gives away his daughter as a gift to the bridegroom, along with other gifts. A similar idea is present in the traditional Christian ceremony in the bride's father walking her to the altar and "giving her away" to the groom. But parental consent is not essential to the validity of a Hindu, Muslim, or Christian marriage.

Although most Hindu marriages even today are family-arranged, marriage by individual choice is also attested in premodern texts and is prevalent in modern India. Such marriages often lead to violent conflict and the social casting out of the couple, and even to suicide and murder, when they cross regional, caste, class, and other boundaries. One traditional way for Hindu communities to understand and accommodate such unions involves viewing them in the perspective of rebirth. Any strong and spontaneous, apparently inexplicable, attraction between persons, or even between a person and a place or object, is often understood to be the consequence of an attachment in a former life.

I have found evidence in ancient texts of parents deciding to accept their children's cross-caste and cross-class marriages on the basis that the young people must have been spouses of the same caste and class in a former lifetime.<sup>15</sup> These texts also explain in the same way same-sex attachments that last a lifetime. For example, in the eleventh-century Sanskrit story cycle the *Kathasaritsagara*, when Pulindaka, a bandit chief, first sees the merchant Vasudatta, he immediately feels intensely drawn to him. The narrator comments: "Vakti janmaantarapritim manah snihyadakaaranam" (Affection [that arises] in the heart

<sup>13</sup> S. K. Mitra, *Mitra on Hindu Law* (New Delhi: Orient, 2000), 516–17.

<sup>14</sup> Anu and Giti, "Inverting Tradition: The Marriage of Lila and Urmila," *Saheli Asia*, <http://www.saheli-asia.org/Sappho/sappho08.htm> (accessed October 3, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> See the section "Rebirth: The Justification of Impossible Loves," in Vanita, "Introduction: Ancient Indian Materials," in Vanita and Kidwai, *Same-Sex Love in India*, 28–30. A more detailed exposition of this idea will appear in my forthcoming book, *Love's Rite*.

without a cause speaks of love [persisting] from a former birth).<sup>16</sup> When Vasudatta later falls in love with the woman who becomes his wife, exactly the same explanation is given for their love. All three spend their lives together, and when Vasudatta kills himself, having remembered his former births, his wife and his male friend kill themselves along with him.

The continuity of such ideas between past and present and between written and oral traditions is evident in the fact that several modern Hindu priests have given similar explanations for same-sex love. In her 1977 book, *The World of Homosexuals*, Shakuntala Devi recorded her interview with Srinivasa Raghavachariar, Sanskrit scholar and priest of the major Vaishnava temple at Sri Rangam in south India. Raghavachariar, himself happily married with thirteen children, said that same-sex lovers must have been cross-sex lovers in a former life. The sex may change but the soul remains the same in subsequent incarnations; hence, the power of love impels these souls to seek each other.<sup>17</sup>

In 2002 I attended the wedding of two Indian women, Mala Nagarajan and Vega Subramaniam, in Seattle. The Shaivite priest who conducted the Hindu ceremony told me that when he was requested to officiate, he thought about it and, though he realized that other priests in his lineage might disagree with him, concluded on the basis of Hindu scriptures that “marriage is a union of spirits, and the spirit is not male or female.” The fact that a similar explanation was given by both a Shaivite and a Vaishnava priest and by a female schoolteacher in an Indian village indicates the overarching cultural importance of the notion that the spirit retains its attachments through various lifetimes.<sup>18</sup>

### Child of Two Mothers: Monstrous or Miraculous?

An example of a marriagelike union between two women is found in a set of canonical fourteenth-century texts. One of these texts is the Krittivasa Ramayana, even today the most popular version of the Rama story in Bengal. It is “said by literary historians to be the most popular single book in all of pre-modern Bengal; and . . . has retained its popularity” today, with a half dozen

<sup>16</sup> Pandit Durgaprasad and Kasinath Pandurang Parab, eds., *The Kathasaritsagara of Somadevabhattacharya*, 4th ed. (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagara, 1930), 86 (my translation).

<sup>17</sup> Shakuntala Devi, *The World of Homosexuals* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1977).

<sup>18</sup> I also explore in my forthcoming book, *Love's Rite*, the idea of the spirit changing gender from one lifetime to another. A few of the weddings reported as female-female in India in fact have involved transgender or transsexual persons. *Hijras*, who are traditionally transgender men, sometimes marry other men. The idea that the spirit has no gender is found in several Hindu texts. In the ancient Sanskrit epic the Mahabharata, the archetypal woman sage, Sulabha, herself unmarried, debates the question with philosopher king Janaka and successfully proves that, as the spirit has no gender and is the same in all beings, women should not be constricted by socially gendered roles. For an exegesis of this important text, see my essay “The Self Is Not Gendered: Sulabha's Debate with King Janaka,” *NWSA Journal* 15, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 76–93.

editions available in Calcutta book markets.<sup>19</sup> This story is, as far as I know, unique, insofar as it tells of a child born of the divinely blessed sexual intercourse between two women who are co-wives, or rather co-widows. Most other premodern narratives of female-female love allow sexual consummation of the relationship only after one woman is changed into a man. Examples are the Greek myth of Iphis and Ianthe recounted by Ovid, and the story of Sikhandini, a woman who becomes a man, in the ancient Hindu epic the Mahabharata. No other story that I know of depicts two women producing a child together.

Opponents of same-sex marriage today repeatedly argue that the purpose of marriage is procreation. This objection keeps popping up despite the dozens of logical refutations offered (for example, Why is marriage allowed between infertile people, people past the age of reproduction, and people who do not intend to procreate?). The argument is not susceptible to logic, because it is rooted in emotion and imagination. An emotional argument can be effectively answered not by a rational but only by another emotional argument. This emotional counterargument was offered by Rosie O'Donnell when she presented to the viewers of her talk show the manifest love between two male partners and their adopted children. In the sacred narratives I examine, too, love emerges as the force that sanctifies the relationship of the two women who produce a child together. This force is experienced as a subjective emotion, but it is also much more than that. It is represented as an objective and universal force, the god of love, Kama, who, by his presence, sanctifies their relationship.

In most cultures children are perceived as a divine blessing. Although this blessing is ideally supposed to be connected with the love between a child's parents, this is of course not always the case. Children are frequently the product of indifferent, loveless, and even hate-filled or violent connections between a man and woman. However, whether or not they are products of love, children are (or were, until recently) products of sexual intercourse between a man and woman, for which the word *love* is often a euphemism. It is on the basis of this euphemistic connection between sexual activity and "love" that antigay forces claim that God blesses heterosexual "love" with fertility and curses homosexual relationships with sterility.

It is because of the emotional, not the rational, value of children that most societies, even those like India which are severely overpopulated, see fertility as a divine blessing. A child is *felt* (rather than thought) to be produced not just by its parents but by some third force, whether Nature or God or the gods. Paradoxically, the natural is also felt to be itself miraculous—patterns of pow-

<sup>19</sup> Tony K. Stewart and Edward C. Dimock, "Kṛttibāsa's Apophatic Critique of Rāma's Kingship," in *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition*, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 243–64.

erful rhetoric represent every child as a miracle of sorts. Any greeting card shop in any city in the world provides evidence that the rhetoric of miracle is more popular than the rhetoric of nature—greeting cards congratulate parents on the blessing or miracle of a child; they do not remark that the child is the natural outcome of heterosexual sex. Why, then, when same-sex couples produce children together, with a little help from their friends, do some opponents of same-sex parenting see this reproduction as monstrous rather than miraculous?

The status of a child of same-sex parents as monstrosity or as miracle is contested in Hindu texts composed in different generic contexts. An ancient Hindu medical text constructs the child of two women as monstrous; some medieval sacred narratives, composed in the context of devotion to the preserver god, and to goddesses, rewrite that medical prescription to turn such a child into an especially miraculous one. I suggest that this rewriting is enabled by two shifts. One is the shift from an unemotional prescriptive context to an emotional and imaginative narrative context. The second is the shift from an ancient purity/pollution context to a medieval devotional context wherein gods, who love their devotees, dissolve all impurities.

First, a quick look at the ancient Hindu medical text, the *Sushruta Samhita*. It states that a boneless child (interpreted by commentators as having cartilaginous bones) is the result of an act of sexual intercourse between two women, in which their *sukra*, or sexual fluids, unite in the womb of one of them.<sup>20</sup> This statement is part of the text's pathologizing of various differences in gender and sexual predilection. As Michael Sweet and Leonard Zwilling have demonstrated, this constitutes the first medicalization of gender and sexual identities, much earlier than the nineteenth-century medicalization in Europe.<sup>21</sup> According to this text, a woman dreaming of sexual intercourse can also conceive and give birth to a jellylike mass. The *Sushruta* suggests cures for some other conditions but does not prescribe any cure for babies born without bones. In fact, in the context of pathologizing various sexual differences, the text seems to suggest that such births are monstrous and the result of impure acts.

The medieval texts, one Sanskrit and two Bengali, rewrite this idea more than a millennium later. The Sanskrit text is a fourteenth-century Bengal recension of a part of the *Padma Purana*, written in the Bengali script. The Bengali texts are two versions of an accretive text, the *Ramayana* attributed to the poet Krittivasa. These texts tell the story of how the hero, Bhagiratha, is born to two co-widows after their husband, King Dilipa, dies childless. The widows'

<sup>20</sup> Kaviraj Kunjalal Bhishagratna, *An English Translation of the "Sushruta Samhita,"* Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series 30 (Varanasi, India: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1991), 132.

<sup>21</sup> Sweet and Zwilling, "First Medicalization."

sexual intercourse is planned and blessed by the gods. In the Padma Purana, the two widows seek out a sage to share their anxiety regarding their husband's line having come to an end. In one of the Bengali versions, Shiva comes to the widows and instructs them to make love together. In these two versions of the text, the child is born boneless, according to the medical text's prognostication, but a sage miraculously cures him—a possibility the medical text does not envisage.

In the third version of the text (the remaining Bengali version), the child is born beautiful and healthy, and the creator god Brahma explains that this is because Kama, god of love (also known as Madan, and the Hindu equivalent of the Greek Eros), inspired the women's lovemaking. The women's lovemaking is described in conventional romantic terms:

The sky was overcast with clouds,  
the swans sang and the peacocks danced.  
The skies darkened and a stormy rain followed.  
Burning with desire induced by Madan [god of love/desire],  
Chandra and Mala  
took each other in embrace,  
and each kissed the other. . . .  
The two women dallied and made love [Dui nari mono ronge  
rongo krira kori].  
God's blessing had enabled the two women to play the game of  
love  
and the energy [tej] of Madan entered the womb of Malavati.  
This is how Malavati became pregnant.<sup>22</sup>

I suggest that the emotional context in these narratives enables the transformation of the potentially monstrous (sex between two women, leading to child-birth) into the miraculous.

What, then, are the emotions that animate these devotional texts in which the devotee is invited to participate? On the one hand, the framing emotion is devotional love directed toward the gods, in the Padma Purana especially toward Vishnu, and in the Krittivasa Ramayana especially toward Rama. Within this frame there are other emotions: the queens' unselfish concern for their husband's lineage, kingdom, and ancestors, and their love for each other and for their child; the gods' concern for the universe and for humans; and the sage's concern for the royal family, the people, and the gods. The text draws the reader in to share all of these emotions. On the other hand, there is the conflicting emotion of distaste at possible pollution caused by sex between the two

<sup>22</sup> Nalinikānta Bhattachāli, ed., *Rāmāyaṇa-Ādikāṇḍa*, by Kṛtīvāsa, Dacca University Oriental Publications Series 4 (Dhaka: P. C. Lahiri, 1936), 90–92. This extract is translated for the first time into English, by Anannya Dasgupta. A full translation will appear in my forthcoming book, *Love's Rite*. See Bhattachāli's introduction for an account of the different manuscripts.

widows. The texts set these conflicting emotions in play and resolve them by privileging some emotions over others.

All of these texts are Vaishnava texts, that is, they are animated by love for Vishnu, the preserver god. Bhagiratha's birth is part of a larger divine plan for the preservation of the universe. Rama, the incarnation of preserver god Vishnu, is to be born in the royal line of Ayodhya. The gods bless the two women's relationship because it furthers that plan. For the devout reader or listener, the possibility that Rama might not be incarnated is a fearful one. The reader is drawn into sharing the gods' anxiety and is also reassured that the plan for the women to become lovers must be good because the gods have devised it. The match between the two women is literally made in heaven.

The only reason for having children that is arguably entirely unselfish is to replenish an underpopulated society or community. The birth of Bhagiratha occurs in precisely that type of context. When King Dilipa dies childless, the royal lineage of the sacred kingdom of Ayodhya apparently comes to an end. This endangers not only Dilipa himself, because he has no son to perform his last rites, but also all of his famous ancestors, whose last rites cannot be performed until one of their descendants brings the river Ganga, who is also a goddess, down from heaven, to earth. Most important, the task of bringing the Ganga to earth is seen as essential to the material and spiritual welfare of the human race. In the Padma Purana, Dilipa's widows are motivated by a selfless anxiety about all these matters when they ask the sage to help them have a son. While they thus help strengthen patrilineage, they also find erotic and emotional fulfillment within the constraints of their situation.

The texts are pervaded by the emotion of wonder directed toward the gods. In the Krittivasa Ramayana, it is the direct intervention and blessing of the gods that sanctifies the two women's relationship. In a sacramental understanding of marriage, whether Christian or Hindu, it is divine blessing that sanctifies a secular relationship. It is also divine blessing that makes the apparently impossible possible. In the first version of the Krittivasa Ramayana, when Shiva tells the women they will have a child, they ask, "We are widows, how can we have a child?" He replies, "By my blessings one of you will have a lovely child."<sup>23</sup> One may compare Mary's question in the Bible, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" and the angel's reply, "With God, nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1: 34, 37 [KJV]). Shiva is a god associated with gender transformation, varying eroticisms, and miraculous birth. He is connected to femaleness through his *ardhanarishwara* (half-man, half-woman) form, and to

<sup>23</sup> Nandkumar Avasthi, ed., *Krittivasa Ramayana*, with Hindi translation (Lucknow, India: Bhuvan Vani, 1966), 60–65. See also Chandrodya Vidyavinod Bhattacharyya, ed., *Sachitra Krtivasi Saptakanda Ramayana* (Calcutta: Manoranjan Bandopadhyaya at Hitavadi Pustakalaya, 1914). The story occurs in the first section, the "Adi Kanda," which traces the ancestry of Rama. For an English translation (by Kumkum Roy), see Vanita and Kidwai, *Same-Sex Love in India*, 100–102.

homoeroticism through his playful transformation into a female to please his wife, Parvati, in love play.<sup>24</sup> He also fathers children with the help of other males (he fathers Ayyappa with Vishnu-Mohini's help, and Kartikeya with Agni's help).<sup>25</sup>

In the second version of the *Krittivasa Ramayana*, the creator god Brahma tells the two women that the god of love made their lovemaking possible and that if there is any demerit associated with it, he (Brahma) will take it on himself so that the women can be free of it. The gods' agency and blessing are more powerfully evident in this version than in the other texts, in that the child is born healthy here and the inauspiciousness of a deformed birth is preempted by love. What is this love? It is an amalgam of the different types of love celebrated in the text—devotional love, romantic love, maternal love, familial love, all embodied in the god Kama.

The presence of the god of love trumps both the medical prognostication that a child born of two women's union will be boneless and also the impurity possibly associated with two widows' sexual union. The romantic description of the women's love, attraction, and sexual union in this text is, then, not fortuitous but directly relevant to the auspiciousness of the outcome. The etymology given for Bhagiratha's name is similar in all three texts:

Bhage bhage sambhog je tathe upagata  
 Brahmadev thuielen nam bhagiratha.  
 [Since he was born of the mutual enjoyment (sexual intercourse)  
 between two vulvas  
 The god Brahma named him Bhagiratha.]<sup>26</sup>

The word *sambhog*, literally meaning "mutual enjoyment," is the word generally used to signify sexual intercourse even today.

That the two women are widows is a fact whose significance bears examination. The *Krittivasa Ramayana*, a normative sacred text in Bengal, endorses the widows' sexual pleasure and thus flies in the face of the stereotype that Hindu widows, especially in Bengal, are stripped of agency and totally forbidden to indulge in pleasure, especially sexual pleasure. The widows' pleasure surfaces in the interstices of the patriarchal family and the patrilineal narrative, overflowing into an excess of pleasurable description—the monsoon, the kisses, the burning desire, the presence of Kama. My argument is that the

<sup>24</sup> See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Śiva, the Erotic Ascetic* (1973; New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); also Vanita, "Introduction: Medieval Materials in the Sanskrit Tradition," in Vanita and Kidwai, *Same-Sex Love in India*, 55–68.

<sup>25</sup> See "Shiva Purana: The Birth of Kartikeya," trans. Kumkum Roy; and Ruth Vanita, "Ayyappa and Vavar: Celibate Friends," in Vanita and Kidwai, *Same-Sex Love in India*, 77–80 and 94–99, respectively.

<sup>26</sup> Bhattasāli, *Rāmāyaṇa-Ādikāṇḍa*, 92.



gods, especially Kama, overcome anxieties regarding the legitimacy of this type of lovemaking. Like the birth of many heroes, Bhagiratha's birth is not in "the order of nature." But most cultures acknowledge at least two ways of being unnatural: a phenomenon may be supernatural or divine, or it may be subnatural and demonic. Bhagiratha's birth, like Christ's, is framed as supernatural.

Let me return to the argument that procreation is the purpose of sexual intercourse and marriage, and that same-sex intercourse and union are therefore wrong. Mark Jordan argues that this argument arises from the fact that the Christian West has not fully eschewed its historical condemnation of erotic and sexual pleasure in general: "The entire force of condemnation—including the surplus of force left over from the concession to marriage—could be brought to bear on it [same-sex love]. The irrational force of the Christian condemnation of Sodomy is the remainder of Christian theology's failure to think through the problem of the erotic."<sup>27</sup> Jordan also points out that many branches of Christianity, in their celebration of families and reproduction, have "degenerated into fertility cults," thereby giving up the Gospels' prioritization of spirit over body.<sup>28</sup> Writing as a Christian, Jordan sees the celebration of biological fertility as pagan, not Christian.

One might also point out, however, that a "pagan" emphasis on biological fertility in conjunction with an acceptance of desire and bodily pleasure as fundamental to life might be congenial to the construction of same-sex desire as potentially, if miraculously, fertile. As discussed earlier, Hindu ascetic traditions developed a deep suspicion of bodily desire and pleasure, but this suspicion always was and still is contested in Hindu philosophy and practice by the dominant idea of Kama or desire as one of the four normative aims of life.<sup>29</sup> In my view, such a concept of bodily, this-worldly pleasure as a major life goal is not central to traditional Christian theology. The blessing of same-sex intercourse with a miraculous child in the Bhagiratha texts may be read as a heterosexist assimilation of same-sex coupling; or it may, conversely, be seen to function as an affirmative incorporation of same-sex sexual and amorous relationships within a religious norm of the good and sanctified life.

## Conclusion

In Hindu sacred narratives, the criteria for judging a relationship praiseworthy appear to be the same whether the relationship is that of siblings,

<sup>27</sup> Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 175.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>29</sup> The other three are *dharma* (often translated as justice, righteousness, or religion, but closer in meaning to "the law of one's being"; *artha* (wealth and material goods); and *moksha* (liberation from the cycle of rebirths).

friends, lovers, or spouses. The question is, Is the relationship a selfish one or does it contribute to the greater good? Purely selfish relationships based only on individual pleasure are judged undesirable and shown to logically culminate in disaster, because two individuals who selfishly desire each other for their own pleasure may also desert each other when they discover that they can get greater pleasure elsewhere. Many Indian-language cautionary folktales tell of a man and woman eloping together only to rapidly discard each other for other lovers.

Desirable relationships in normative Hindu texts are those in which the individuals make sacrifices not only for each other but also for their families and friends, the community, humanity, and the gods. These norms, which also reappear in modern Indian cinema, are not very different from those that Alan Bray analyzes in his book *The Friend*.<sup>30</sup> Examining the tombs of same-sex couples buried together in European churches from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries, he shows that these relationships were publicly honored in premodern Christian societies.

The one significant difference, I would argue, concerns sexual relations. Christian traditions judge male-female relationships as bad or good depending on whether they are only about sexual desire (lust) or also about love. In the Bible a male-female relationship that is both sexual and loving can be celebrated as good (for example, the relationship in the Song of Songs). However, although the Bible represents good same-sex relationships as intense and passionate, they cannot be represented as sexual; famous examples are those of David and Jonathan, and Naomi and Ruth. Same-sex relationships cannot be represented as good if they are explicitly sexual, because premodern Jewish and Christian traditions were unable to fully embrace human sexuality as good. I am aware of the many commentators who rightly point out that the biblical condemnations of same-sex intercourse are historically specific, have been misinterpreted and blown out of proportion, and have nothing to do with homosexuality, especially with loving same-sex relationships today.<sup>31</sup> Although I agree with many of these arguments, I would add that same-sex sexual intercourse is never represented positively in the Bible. This absence allows those so inclined to focus obsessively on apparently negative references. Hindu texts, in contrast, are occasionally able to represent same-sex relationships as both sexual and good.

Saleem Kidwai and I remarked that in the course of our research we did

<sup>30</sup> Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>31</sup> See, among others, John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); and Steven Greenberg, *Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

not find evidence of anyone ever having been executed in India for same-sex relations. Today, I would modify that statement to say that the many suicides by same-sex couples in India today constitute a type of execution. Given that many cross-sex couples also are driven to suicide today, the crime would seem to be not same-sex love as such but romantic love itself, because romantic love is seen as opposed to social norms.

However, earlier ways of accommodating love in its many forms have not disappeared from Hindu tradition. The same-sex weddings that have taken place in India with familial participation and Hindu priests officiating constitute one manifestation of that survival. There are also many LGBT rights groups in India now. Most of them are connected with organizations funded primarily to combat HIV and AIDS, but there are also many smaller groups focused on gay rights.<sup>32</sup> The right to marry has not, so far, been a major issue for any of these organizations. One reason may be that the Indian state, though a secular democracy, has not yet fully taken control of marriage in the way Western democratic states have since the nineteenth century. Marriage still functions primarily in the purview of family and community, not the state. Modern Indian marriage laws recognize as valid any Hindu wedding conducted according to the rites that are customary in the community of one of the partners. A vast majority of heterosexual marriages in India today take place without a marriage license and are never registered with the state. The Indian government does not confer as many privileges and benefits on married couples as the U.S. government does. Therefore, most people never report their marriages—or, indeed, their divorces—to the government. All such family matters are conducted within the community, with the approval of elders. This means that local communities play a large part in deciding what constitutes a marriage. Those who witnessed the weddings of same-sex couples that were reported in the press over the past two decades clearly considered them marriages, and the couples live a married life in their communities.

In its 1991 report *Less Than Gay: A Citizens' Report on the Status of Homosexuality in India*, the ABVA demanded, among other things, that the government amend the marriage laws to recognize same-sex marriage. It reiterated this demand in *For People Like Us*, its 1999 report on the attempted suicide of two women, Mamata Rani Mohanty and Monalisa Mohanty, whose families were trying to separate them.<sup>33</sup> Mamata and Monalisa had registered a partnership deed, and several other female couples in India have also tried to

<sup>32</sup> For listings, see *Trikone*, a magazine for South Asian LGBT people, published in San Francisco since 1986 (<http://www.trikone.org>); and *Bombay Dost*, India's longest-running lesbian-gay magazine, published in Bombay since 1990.

<sup>33</sup> AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan, *Less Than Gay: A Citizens' Report on the Status of Homosexuality in India* (New Delhi: AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan, 1991), and *For People Like Us* (New Delhi: AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan, 1999).

obtain legal recognition of some sort for their unions. It is only a matter of time before a petition is filed demanding that same-sex marriages be recognized in law.

The Indian situation makes clear what is often obscured in the United States: the fact that however many rights a government may confer or withhold, marriage is defined by people themselves, not by governments. A few decades ago, interracial marriages were illegal in the United States, and many Americans considered them unnatural; in the nineteenth century, many Hindus considered intercaste marriage and widow remarriage illegal and immoral. Nevertheless, such marriages did take place, and they were real marriages in the eyes of enlightened people.

At the 2002 wedding of Mala Nagarajan and Vega Subramaniam, in Seattle, Subramaniam's father read a poem in Tamil that he had composed. In the poem he quoted the ancient Tamil seer and poet Valluvan: "The seat of life is love; anyone who does not have it is only a mass of bones encased by skin." Love is love and marriage is marriage, whether between a man and woman, two men, or two women.



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The Male Bond in Chinese History and Culture

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*AHR Forum*  
The Male Bond in Chinese History and Culture

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SUSAN MANN

HISTORIANS OF EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA credit feminist theory and women's history for introducing gender as a category of analysis, sparking interest in gender identity and performance, leading in turn to new work on "the history of men as men."<sup>1</sup> Not so—at least not yet—in the field of Chinese history. Among historians of China, women's studies and feminist theory have stimulated reams of published work. Much of this work, however, remains at the margins of mainstream academic research, which may partly explain why scholars of China have been slow to grasp the significance of gender theory for the study of Chinese history. But it is not simply the reluctant reception of women's history that makes the China field anomalous when it comes to the study of men. In point of fact, historians of China have yet to develop a sustained interest in the study of sexuality, which has been the starting point for work on the history of men and of masculinity in European and North American studies.<sup>2</sup> And even China scholars drawn to women's history have been slow to appreciate the importance of men's studies to their own enterprise.<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting, then, that the articles in this *Forum* constitute the first collaborative attempt by historians of China writing in English to investigate social relationships among men, using gender as a category of analysis.

Why have historical studies of Chinese men "as men" been so few? The question

The articles in this *Forum* were first presented at a panel on "The Male-Male Bond in Late Imperial and Republican China," presented in Atlanta on January 5, 1996, at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association. Special thanks are due to Norman Kutcher, who organized the panel, and to Gail Hershatler, who served as chair. This writer also acknowledges with appreciation the comments and criticisms of the editors and manuscript reviewers for the *American Historical Review* and the suggestions of Catherine Kudlick, Clarence E. Walker, and Weijing Lu.

<sup>1</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York, 1996), 2. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler, eds., *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1997), x, credit feminist theorists Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler for historians' interest in masculinity and femininity as "multiple sites for the production of cultural meaning."

<sup>2</sup> Exceptions are Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Durham, N.C., 1995); Frank Dikötter, *Sex, Culture and Modernity in China: Medical Science and the Construction of Sexual Identities in the Early Republican Period* (Honolulu, 1995); and Charlotte Furth, *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's Medical History, 960–1665* (Berkeley, Calif., 1999).

<sup>3</sup> As Leora Auslander put it, "Adequate explanations of how men come to understand their gender and sexuality are crucial even if one's primary preoccupation is women. Given the relational nature of gender, and the centrality of processes of differentiation to its making, ignorance of one gender produces ignorance of the other." See "Do Women's + Men's + Lesbian and Gay + Queer Studies = Gender Studies?" *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (1997): 7.

is especially vexing because, as we shall see, bonds among men were key to success and survival for rich and poor, elite and commoner, in Chinese history. One answer may lie in the history of gender studies in the China field as a whole. This history began in the 1970s, when anthropologists in Taiwan, together with scholars interested in women and socialist revolution in China proper, shook loose decades of scholarship encrypted in the “patrilocal, patrilineal, and patriarchal” language of China’s family system. Historians of my own generation still recall the startling impact of Margery Wolf’s classic analysis of women and the family in rural Taiwan. The rhetoric of the Chinese family system—rhetoric that shaped the perception of virtually all historians—relegated women to the margins; but the meaning of family relationships, Wolf showed, placed women at the center. Ephemeral emotional bonds centered on a single mother during her lifetime were revealed, in Wolf’s stunning analysis, to lie at the very heart of the enduring “patriarchal” family structure.<sup>4</sup> Wolf’s work inspired new research on modern Chinese women, and by the 1990s a veritable flood of major monographs and articles on women in earlier periods had come into print.<sup>5</sup> This rapid transformation might have signaled a transformation of the kind that reshaped European and North American history.<sup>6</sup> Curiously, though, research on Chinese women did not stimulate much interest in the subject of men or male culture in Chinese history. Instead, ironically, the turn toward “women’s studies” in the China field seems to have encouraged a turn *away* from studies of men. The turn away from studying men, in other words, was perhaps an inevitable result of a backlash against the China field’s obsession with problems of patriarchy and male dominance. Still another reason why histories of women have not been followed by historical studies of men may be that studying men looks easy, while studying women (if the Chinese historical record supplies your evidence) is hard. What men do is, after all, the pervasive subject of Chinese documents and texts of every kind. Women, by contrast, become visible only if historians read between the lines, track down obscure sources, and bring neglected collections to light. A new book about women—razzle-dazzle—may transform the field! But another book about men? Many scholars seem to have concluded that we know enough about Chinese men already.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Margery Wolf, *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan* (Stanford, Calif., 1972).

<sup>5</sup> The subject of Chinese women’s history is now a virtual publishing industry, much of it still reclaiming a past where foot-binding and female suicide are not the dominant themes. Meanwhile, studies of women have retained a prominent place in the interdisciplinary field of contemporary Chinese studies in North America. For recent reviews of this literature, see Ann Waltner, “Recent Scholarship on Chinese Women,” *Signs* 21 (Winter 1996): 410–28; Jinhua Emma Teng, “The Construction of the ‘Traditional Chinese Woman’ in the Western Academy: A Critical Review,” *Signs* 22 (Autumn 1996): 115–51; and Susan Mann, “The History of Chinese Women before the Age of Orientalism,” *Journal of Women’s History* 8 (Winter 1997): 163–76.

<sup>6</sup> In European historiography, the growth of men’s studies was signaled by the founding, in 1989, of the journal *Gender and History*, followed in the United States in 1992 by the *Journal of Men’s Studies*. Reviews begin with David H. J. Morgan, “Men Made Manifest: Histories and Masculinities,” *Gender and History* 1 (Spring 1989): 87–91; see also Frank Mort, “Crisis Points: Masculinities in History and Social Theory,” *Gender and History* 6 (April 1994): 124–30; and Anna Davin, “Historical Masculinities: Regulation, Fantasy and Empire,” *Gender and History* 9 (April 1997): 135–38.

<sup>7</sup> The most important historical work on men to emerge thus far from the new era of gender studies on China is a study of male homosexuality: Bret Hinsch’s *Passions of the Cut Sleeve*. Hinsch’s work is the first in English to survey the counterculture of male love and sexual relations outside the boundaries

The failure of China historians to consider male bonds and relations among men as a legitimate subject of gender analysis has already created new distortions and pedagogical obstacles—obstacles that many historians in European and North American fields immediately identified and sought to overcome as women's history gained stature. Graduate students studying Chinese history still equate “gender studies” with “women's studies,” and they may search in vain for examples of scholarship using gender as a category of analysis where the historical subjects are entirely male.<sup>8</sup> Ironically, this unhappy situation is an even bigger problem in the China field than it was in either European or North American history, because China's late imperial society was even more sex-segregated than contemporary societies in the West or, for that matter, in the rest of East Asia. Thus any historian of China whose subject lies outside the domestic sphere—in the bureaucracy, in trade and commerce, in secret societies or rebellions, in scholarly academies or the civil service examination—will find himself or herself studying almost exclusively men and their relationships with each other. Yet no one has thought to ask what sorts of homosocial bonds these various sex-segregated social networks gave rise to or how they might be understood.<sup>9</sup>

How might we use gender as a category of analysis to understand relationships

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of the patriarchal family. But with its exclusive focus on sexuality, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve* is hardly the male-centered answer to studies of Chinese women that explore “women's culture” and the bonds joining women as writers, as friends, or as kinfolk. And it does not correspond at all to the studies of “masculinity” that have produced new journals and new genres in Euro-North American history since the late 1980s. See *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley, Calif., 1990). Two recent studies point in new directions, however: Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif., 2000); and Giovanni Vitiello, “Exemplary Sodomites: Chivalry and Love in Late Ming Culture,” *Nan Nü: Men, Women and Gender in Early and Imperial China* 2, no. 2 (2000) [in press]. See also Michael Szonyi, “The Cult of Hu Tianbao and the Eighteenth-Century Discourse of Homosexuality,” *Late Imperial China* 19 (June 1998): 1–25. In the Japan field, by contrast, studies of male sexuality have been more numerous and broader in scope. See, in particular, Roger Keyes, *The Male Journey in Japanese Prints* (Berkeley, 1989); Gary P. Leupp, *Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley, 1995); and Gregory M. Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600–1950* (Berkeley, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> In the China field, for example, students looking for gender studies will encounter works on women such as Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997). This has been a problem in North American and European history as well; see Morgan, “Men Made Manifest.” Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 3–4, complains about women's studies and its failure “to make gender visible to men,” citing Thomas Laqueur's observation that “woman alone seems to have ‘gender,’” in *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), 22. In this regard, scholars should take note of the forthcoming publication of *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities*, edited by Susan Brownell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, with a foreword by Thomas Laqueur (Berkeley, Calif., 2001). This reader will pair new or reprinted essays on women with commissioned essays on related topics that deal with manhood.

<sup>9</sup> Analogues from the U.S. and European literature bring to mind (on guilds and merchants) Merry Wiesner, “Guilds, Male Bonding and Women's Work in Early Modern Germany,” *Gender and History* 1 (Summer 1989): 125–37; and Lyndal Roper, “Stealing Manhood: Capitalism and Magic in Early Modern Germany,” *Gender and History* 3 (Spring 1991): 4–22; (on friendship) Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (Chicago, 1987), 99–103, 215–19; (on brotherhoods) Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven, Conn., 1989); Mary Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism* (Princeton, N.J., 1989); and Lynn Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880–1930* (Princeton, 1984). Among U.S. historians, the notion of parallel “male” and “female” communities has even entered mainstream textbooks, as in Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York, 1996), 203–39.



between men in Chinese history and culture? What new insights may emerge to transform the field if we do? Historians of women have already raised questions about flashpoints or shifts in the construction of masculinity. Reflecting on the origins of foot-binding during the Song dynasty (960–1279), Patricia Ebrey opines that “new notions of masculinity” were partly responsible, in particular the ideal of an upper-class gentleman scholar who “might seem effeminate unless women could be made even more delicate, reticent, and stationary” than their male counterparts. Gail Hershatzer’s study of an emerging modern consciousness in twentieth-century Shanghai shows how “men defined themselves in relationship to each other” by embracing rituals that either celebrated courtesans or criticized prostitution.<sup>10</sup> Rather than examining a flashpoint of historical change, the three articles in this *Forum* explore fault lines and contradictions embedded in the structures of ordinary life in late imperial and early modern China. Each helps the reader to see why, in a sex-segregated society, male bonds embodied particular kinds of tensions. By showing how gender relations were constructed in relationships among men, the authors also raise new questions about Chinese women’s history.

A FOCUS ON THREE DIFFERENT VENUES in this *Forum* enables Adrian Davis, Lee McIsaac, and Norman Kutcher to defamiliarize and reexamine Confucian norms governing human relationships in male culture. The three venues of male bonding their articles consider are the family (fraternal bonds between siblings), sworn brotherhoods or secret societies (fictive kin bonds or bonds between surrogate brothers), and friendship (bonds between male friends). These three venues are the sociological outcome of three grand structures or processes that framed human action in late imperial China: the family system, the civil service examination system, and patterns of male sojourning. Each of these structures ensured that men spent most of their sociable time with other men, *not* with women. Let us begin by reviewing these structures briefly.

In the Chinese family system, parents’ foremost obligation was rearing a male heir to carry on the descent line. This imperative introduced a decided preference for sons into reproductive decisions, especially among ordinary commoners with limited means. As a consequence, practices ranging from neglect of daughters to female infanticide skewed the sex ratio in most Chinese populations, leaving large numbers of unmarried men competing for a relatively small pool of eligible brides. Meanwhile, in the absence of a respectable alternative to marriage for women, more than 99 percent of women in Chinese society became wives or were “married” as concubines. An endemic pool of young, rootless single males, the demographic casualties of this marriage market, flocked to towns and cities looking for work, homeless and vulnerable.<sup>11</sup> They supplied the membership of the secret societies

<sup>10</sup> Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Song Period* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993), 41–42; Gail Hershatzer, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Berkeley, 1997), 11–12.

<sup>11</sup> Ted A. Telford, “Covariates of Men’s Age at First Marriage: The Historical Demography of Chinese Lineages,” *Population Studies* 46 (March 1992): 19–35; Telford, “Family and State in Qing



FIGURE 1: The Peach Garden Oath, in which the Three Kingdoms heroes Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zhang Fei pledge themselves to brotherhood in the cause of righteousness. Woodblock print in an edition from the Yu family publishing house, Jian'an, Fujian (fourteenth century). Reprinted in *Zhongguo banhua shi tu lu* [Illustrated record of the history of Chinese woodcut illustrations], Zhou Wu, ed. (Shanghai, 1988), vol. 2: 456.

studied by McIsaac. The Chinese government kept an eye on this group, especially in crisis periods of the sort McIsaac examines. Unemployed vagrants and homeless

China: Marriage in the Tongcheng Lineages, 1650–1880,” Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, eds., *Family Process and Political Process in Modern Chinese History*, 2 vols. (Taipei, 1992), 2: 921–42.

people, and other persons who were not safely rooted in families and stable agrarian communities, were always seen as potential rebels or bandits.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, it must be stressed that this particular venue for male bonding, with its attendant tensions and manifest instability, was continuously reproduced as a result of China's normative family system and its *normal* functioning.

In China's late imperial culture, where elite mobility strategies focused on the civil service examination system, schooling for elite males past the age of ten or so took place almost exclusively in academies and schools outside the home, with the sole aim of training students to pass.<sup>13</sup> An examination degree was a prerequisite for a position in government in late imperial times, and government was the most prestigious career open to elite men.<sup>14</sup> The civil service examinations and the educational institutions that prepared men to sit for the exams were exclusively male domains, since no women held posts in the government's civil service. In the schools and in the examinations themselves, men established hierarchical bonds with other men through patronage, mentoring, and "pupilship" or "discipleship." They learned to compete against one another for recognition and status even while forming self-conscious bonds of solidarity and friendship, based on common examination year, common teachers, common schools, and so forth. Here, too, as young boys (as we learn from the great eighteenth-century novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*), they formed their earliest emotional attachments outside the family.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, like the family system, the civil service examination system sustained both the bonds that engaged men as comrades and the conflicts that set them at odds as competitors. Examination training socialized men to bureaucratic norms and public service. It also introduced them to the niceties of personal connections and patronage that were keys to success in the cumbersome government apparatus where they had to negotiate their careers.

As for male sojourning, in China's core towns and cities with ready access to trade and transport networks, commoner males routinely traveled abroad to engage in business or the trades, joining the elite travelers studying for or taking examinations and holding office. By contrast, most respectable women—whether elite or commoner—remained at home. This pattern of sex-segregated male sojourning was once again a function of the normative family system, devoted to perpetuating and preserving the purity of male descent lines. Cloistered daughters in respectable families were married by parental arrangement to young men from comparable backgrounds. Keeping a daughter respectably at home was one key to an advantageous marriage alliance. Meanwhile, as men sojourned abroad, they relied not on women but on male networks based on common native place or common occupation. Guilds and native-place associations (often translated as *Landsmannschaften*, citing the nearest European counterpart) supplied welfare, medical

<sup>12</sup> Philip A. Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Ichisada Miyazaki, *China's Examination Hell: The Civil Service Examinations of Imperial China*, Conrad Schirokauer, trans. (New Haven, Conn., 1963).

<sup>14</sup> Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility, 1368–1911* (New York, 1962).

<sup>15</sup> See Cao Xueqin, *The Story of the Stone: A Chinese Novel in Five Volumes*, David Hawkes, trans. (vols. 1–3) and John Minford, trans. (vols. 4–5) (New York, 1973–86), 1: 177–82, 205–16.



FIGURE 2: "Four Brothers Happy Together." Auspicious New Year painting (color woodblock print) celebrating brotherly harmony among the many sons in this family. Qing dynasty. Reproduced in *Zhongguo minjian nianhua shi tu lu* [Illustrated record of the history of Chinese New Year paintings], Wang Shucun, ed. (Shanghai, 1991), vol. 2: 656.

care (including death benefits), networks of friends who spoke one's native dialect, and connections to powerful people who could serve as advocates and protectors.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, as a result of these three grand structures, late imperial China was a society where the dominant channels of social mobility ensured that men would spend the better part of their social lives interacting exclusively with other men. This was a culture where we could expect homosocial bonding to reach the state of a very high art. *The way men learned to be social was in the company of other men.* Let us now turn to the three venues for male bonding examined in the following essays.

<sup>16</sup> See especially Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853–1937* (Berkeley, Calif., 1995); on guilds, see Peter J. Golas, "Early Ch'ing Guilds," in G. William Skinner, ed., *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif., 1977), and literature cited therein.

ADRIAN DAVIS'S ARTICLE BEGINS WITH a crucial anthropological observation about the Chinese family system, identifying the tension that lies at its heart. Under the rules of equal inheritance, brothers are "equal" as co-parceners of their father's estate. Under the rules of Confucian filiality, on the other hand, brothers are hierarchically ranked siblings who must self-consciously address one another as "elder" and "younger." It was not uncommon for family members to nickname boys in the same generational cohort by birth order, hence "Big Eldest," "Little Fourth." Brothers shared a common obligation of filial piety to their parents, but their relationships to one another were highly differentiated. These differences were exacerbated, ironically, by parental behavior, because Chinese parents made differential investments in their male offspring based on practical assessments of their chances for success in different occupations.<sup>17</sup> Tracing these basic tensions at the core of the Chinese family system, Davis stresses that fraternal relations were *negotiated* and that legal cases reveal a variety of conceptions of fraternity. Therefore, a central point we may take from his article is that little boys learned about the strife and competition embedded in hierarchical adult male bonds from their earliest childhood interactions with their brothers. Brothers' common moral obligation to filiality instantly embroiled them in intense competition for parental—especially maternal—affection and favoritism. Notice, too, that whereas most studies of Chinese childhood focus on child socialization by parents, Davis's article shows that much of child socialization occurred in sibling relationships, not relationships with parents, and brothers socialized their brothers, often in spite of their parents' intentions. Relationships between brothers were potentially subversive precisely because parents could not, in the end, control or monitor them; as I have noted, male sibling relations bred conflicts that parents themselves exacerbated.<sup>18</sup> *Fen jia*—the division of the family estate contested by two or more married brothers—is the emblem of the inability of parents ultimately to control these competitive filial interests.

THE EXCLUSIONARY FORCES OF THE MARRIAGE MARKET—which discriminated harshly against poor young men—explain why brotherhoods were so important in late imperial Chinese society. But why were brotherhoods subversive? Lee McIsaac's article on brotherhoods begins to answer this question by pointing out that the language of secret societies used a contradictory code. When addressing one another, society members used the terminology of loyalty and brotherhood, but their codes of conduct invoked the virtues of *friendship*. That is, the oaths of sworn brothers committed them not to brotherly fraternity but to the "common purpose" (*tong zhi*) or "shared heart" (*tong xin*) of friends. In that sense, brotherhoods

<sup>17</sup> G. William Skinner, "'Seek a Loyal Subject in a Filial Son': Family Roots of Political Orientation in Chinese Society," in Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, *Family Process and Political Process in Modern Chinese History*, 2: 943–93.

<sup>18</sup> Skinner, "Seek a Loyal Subject," 959–62, points out that the presence of a sister greatly reduces the subversive potential of brothers' behavior in Chinese families and that, for that reason, Chinese parents might find it highly desirable to have at least one daughter.

display not the hierarchical arrangement of geese in formation (the metaphor for brothers in the kinship system); instead, sworn brotherhoods fostered distinctive relationships in which junior men “of common purpose” shared equally in a common relationship of subservience and loyalty to a patron, or “elder brother.” McIsaac presents a range of possibilities for male bonding within the context of sworn brotherhoods. At one extreme is the macho version. This is represented by the coercive leadership style of the Robed Brothers, based on patronage and protection serving the interests of elders. At the other extreme, though, we find young boys at work as sailors, hoping only to avoid being attacked or even killed when setting foot on a strange dock, or strategizing to escape conscription into the Nationalist Army. What does this tell us about these brotherhood bonds? They provided leadership opportunities, power, and perquisites for the few, protection for the many. But they were also fragile bonds, easily quashed—as the Qing government recognized—by seizing key leaders, or readily coopted—as Republican leaders knew—to serve other goals.

Philip Kuhn’s study of an eighteenth-century sorcery scare reveals dramatically how brutal Chinese government and community opinion could be toward the rootless and the homeless.<sup>19</sup> The marriage market ensured that virtually all of the rootless and homeless poor were men. Their attachment to the language of friendship and loyalty, which they used to create fragile bonds of patronage and protection, is one of the great examples of the crucial function of male bonding, enabling the survival of the most vulnerable members of the population.

More subversive than commoner brotherhoods, as far as the state was concerned, was male bonding within elite circles of scholar-officials. In the Qing period, “cliques” of men bound by a common “high purpose” (*tong zhi*) were condemned and suppressed by suspicious Manchu emperors, who recalled only too well the immense danger posed to the state by the Donglin faction and other groups maneuvering for influence in the late Ming court.<sup>20</sup> In a provocative essay on friendship in the late Ming, when circles of “friends” were probably at their most powerful, Joseph McDermott has shown how late Ming dissenters viewed friendship circles (*wu dang*) as a potential moral base from which to attack imperial despotism.<sup>21</sup> Their focus on *tong xin* (“same heart-mind”) led some of these men to

<sup>19</sup> Kuhn, *Soulstealers*.

<sup>20</sup> On factions in Chinese politics of this period, see David S. Nivison, “Ho-shen and His Accusers: Ideology and Political Behavior in the Eighteenth Century,” in Nivison and Arthur F. Wright, eds., *Confucianism in Action* (Stanford, Calif., 1959).

<sup>21</sup> See Joseph P. McDermott, “Friendship and Its Friends in the Late Ming,” in Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, *Family Process and Political Process in Modern Chinese History*, 1: 67–96. This notion can be traced at least as far back as the Song, when feelings of shared moral and intellectual commitment formed the basis of the “fellowship” joining Zhu Xi and others, who called themselves devotees of “Daoxue” in order to “identify a particular tradition and fellowship distinct both from other Sung Confucians and from conventional Confucians.” Hoyt Cleveland Tillman selects the term “fellowship” (conceding that he is not referring to an association or a society) to underscore the fact that the members had “a network of social relations and a sense of community with a shared tradition,” on the basis of which they “forged personal, political, and intellectual ties in a common effort to reform political culture, revive ethical values, and rectify Confucian learning.” Their bonds were strengthened by a common meeting place (a local academy), rituals involving prostration to declare themselves pupils of a common teacher, mutual aid (especially in careers), distinctive mannerisms and styles of dress and deportment, and a special vocabulary and focus on certain issues. By the 1170s, they were

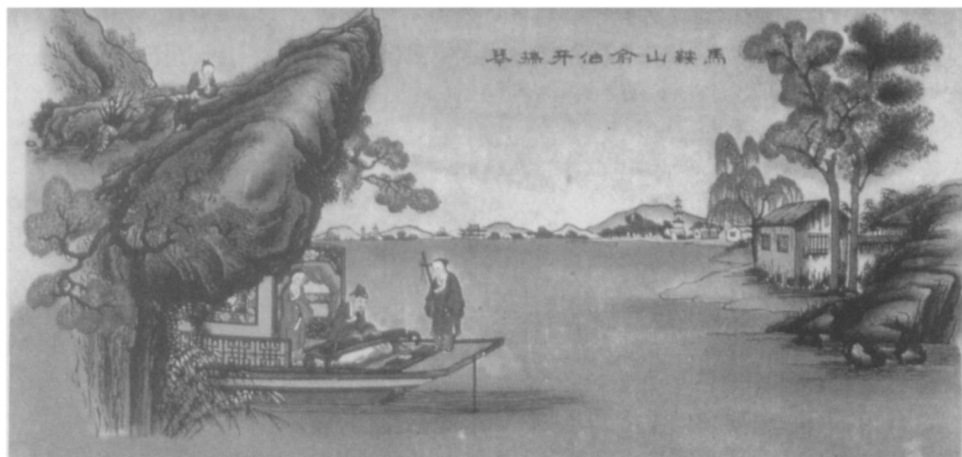


FIGURE 3: Bo Ya plays the zither while Zhong Ziqi listens. New Year painting celebrating the friend who “knows my sounds.” Ink-line woodblock print, color-filled, nineteenth century, from the publishing house of Yangliuqing, Tianjin. Reproduced in *Zhongguo Yangliuqing muban nianhua ji* [Album of Paintings of China: Yangliuqing Woodblock New Year Pictures], Tianjin Yangliuqing hua she, comp. (Tianjin, 1992), vol. 1: 14.

believe that *only* among friends could one’s true heart-mind develop and reach its full morally realized potential. Why? Friends do not have the demands and expectations, nor does friendship entail the constraints, that are unavoidable within the family or larger kin group, or in patron-client relationships such as teacher/pupil (not to mention ruler/minister). To get clear in your thinking, to air your thoughts freely, to square away your real values and affirm them, you need the support of good, loyal friends.

THE MANCHU GOVERNMENT ACKNOWLEDGED the great power of elite friendship in its paranoid reactions to factions (*dang*) and in its very successful campaigns to suppress self-identified cliques of friends within the scholarly elite.<sup>22</sup> Yet despite government proscriptions, intimate emotional relationships among men reached far beyond the kinship system throughout the Qing period, and the quest for “someone who knows my sounds” (*zhi yin*) runs through the memoirs of Qing literati.<sup>23</sup> In

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calling themselves “our faction” (*wu dang*). Tillman, *Confucian Discourse and Chu Hsi’s Ascendancy* (Honolulu, 1992), 3.

<sup>22</sup> In his study of Qing repression of factions, Nivison observes that the Qing government’s concern harked back to the keyword “same heart-mind” (*tong xin*), used to connote not only friendship but political alliance by Ouyang Xiu in his famous essay on factions, written in 1044. Ouyang noted that “inferior persons” join in temporary alliances to serve the same material interests but later turn on each other when those interests diverge, whereas “superior men” form permanent bonds based on their allegiance to a common *dao*—they are loyal and trustworthy. Nivison, “Ho-shen and His Accusers,” 218–32.

<sup>23</sup> The phrase “knows my sounds” comes from the story of Bo Ya and Zhong Ziqi, dating from at least the third century BCE. Bo Ya was a gifted zither player who delighted in Zhong Ziqi’s company. When Bo Ya played with his mind set on Mount Tai, Ziqi said of his music, “How it soars!” When Bo Ya played with his mind on the rushing rivers, Ziqi would say, “How it flows!” When Ziqi died, Bo Ya broke the strings on his zither, because there was no one left in the world who could hear and understand his music.

men's culture, the oldest histories tell tales of mutual trust and reciprocal obligation—like the story of Guan Zhong and Bao Shu recounted in Norman Kutcher's article—that form the foundations of manly relationships. Sima Qian, the author of China's first dynastic history, describes heroic knights-errant: "Their words were always sincere and trustworthy, and their actions always quick and decisive. They were always true to what they promised, and without regard to their own persons, they would rush into dangers threatening others."<sup>24</sup> Picking up where these stories left off, the novel—as in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *All Men Are Brothers*, and *Journey to the West*—later celebrated bonds joining men of common purpose, which McIsaac emphasizes in her study of brotherhoods. The Peach Garden Oath of the heroes of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, the righteous cause of the "outlaws of the marsh," the epic search for Buddhist texts by the irrepressible Monkey and his three unlikely companions—all dramatized for readers the empathic emotional attraction between men who appreciate and play off against one another's complementary qualities.<sup>25</sup> Robert Ruhlmann perceptively remarks, "Liu Pei, Kuan Yü, and Chang Fei [the three heroes who pledge an oath in the Peach Garden], meeting for the first time and by coincidence, are mutually attracted by each other's size and distinctive features . . . Passionate and sensitive, the heroes possess 'outstanding gifts of personality and talent, and the resolution to behave on a level higher than that of the sages and the wise.'"<sup>26</sup> Far from supplying mere plotlines in novels, the desire for male camaraderie runs like a theme through other literary genres, especially autobiographical writings and poetry.<sup>27</sup>

Naturally, through the centuries, male bonds based on a common "high purpose" sparked radical political action, the reason why Qing rulers suppressed factions. Even so, writings on friendship—poems, essays, letters—continued to fill the literary collections of Qing statesmen and scholars. Poignant and empathic, their memoirs of one another's lives testify to deep emotional attachment. These attachments came easily to men who spent their formative years in intimate contact with other men: taking exams, traveling lonely roads, sheltering in the care of a

<sup>24</sup> Translated in Lien-sheng Yang, "The Concept of 'Pao' as a Basis for Social Relations in China," in *Excursions in Sinology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), 6.

<sup>25</sup> See comments on the first two of these novels in McIsaac's article. All have been translated into English. See Luo Guanzhong, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, C. H. Brewitt-Taylor, trans. (Taipei, 1969); and *Three Kingdoms: China's Epic Drama*, Moss Roberts, trans. and ed. (New York, 1976); Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong, *Outlaws of the Marsh*, Sidney Shapiro, trans., 2 vols. (Beijing and Bloomington, Ind., 1981); and Wu Cheng'en, *The Journey to the West*, Anthony C. Yu, trans. and ed., 4 vols. (Chicago, 1977–83).

<sup>26</sup> See Robert Ruhlmann, "Traditional Heroes in Chinese Popular Fiction," in Arthur F. Wright, ed., *The Confucian Persuasion* (Stanford, Calif., 1960), 150–51. Ruhlmann is quoting the study by L. S. Yang cited in what follows.

<sup>27</sup> On autobiography, see Pei-yi Wu, *The Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China* (Princeton, N.J., 1990), 59–60, 258–59. Poems about parting or separation celebrate the devotion of friends, as Kutcher points out. They take as their tropes historical figures like the Han dynasty prisoners of war Su Wu and Li Ling, forced to part after nineteen years in captivity. See Arthur Waley's translation of the poem attributed to Li Ling, "Parting from Su Wu," in *Chinese Poems* (London, 1962), 44. A fine example from the Qing literati is the poem by Qiao Lai translated by Jiaosheng Wang, in *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*, Victor H. Mair, ed. (New York, 1994), 366–67.



benefactor, struggling to support a distant wife, parents, and children, lending each other money, doing one another favors. Reflecting on his bonds with his own male friends, the eighteenth-century scholar-official Hong Liangji counted only one "friend for life," and a single "soulmate," along with two "close" friends, five "literary" friends, and five others whom he considered purely "ceremonial." He describes his "friend for life" as a person who was "not influenced by glory or humbleness, not affected by decline or prosperity; a man who does not measure your worth by the vicissitudes of your career, nor judge your character on the basis of your public record." Of the "soulmate," Hong remarks, he "has nothing in common with me, whether dwelling at home or traveling abroad, and yet the expressions from his heart may be trusted. He is a man who may go in many different directions but who throws himself completely into whatever he does." Hong's "close" friends he describes briefly as "men of high caliber, able to discern right from wrong and sort out the evil from the good." His literary friends were a mixed lot: one was inspiring because he "freely poured out his feelings," three others were good to read classical texts with, and the last was "utterly correct" in everything he did and everything he wrote. As for the "ceremonial" friends, "our relationships have very clear limits set by the demands of etiquette and propriety."<sup>28</sup>

Hong Liangji's brief sketch on friendship sums up the tensions identified by Kutcher: true friends are rare, and friendships are strained by the hierarchical social pressures bearing down on all men who strive for success. Reading to the end of Hong's little essay, I was surprised to encounter his final words: "The spirit of ancient men of high purpose continues through the ages. This poor body of mine may be cast aside, but my pledges of trust will endure." Perhaps genteel scholars like Hong Liangji always measured their relationships with other men against the standard of the heroes of Sima Qian's day, or other heroes of time past—including those who died as martyrs resisting the Qing conquest. Perhaps when they conceived of friendship, they always imagined the ideal of the blood oath, signaling integrity as well as nurturance and security.<sup>29</sup>

JUST AS THEY CALL ATTENTION to neglected essays like Hong's, the studies of the male bond in this *Forum* offer insights that invite deeper research into gender relations and gender difference in Chinese history. As European and North American historians have discovered, studies of men bring us back to women's studies with

<sup>28</sup> "On Friendship" [*Yuan you*], "Juanshige wen, yiji, xubian" [Essays from the Pavilion of the Juanshi Plant, Second Collection, Supplement], Shoujing tang edn., n.d., 4b–5a, in *Hong Beijiang xiansheng yiji* [The collected works of Hong Beijiang (Liangji)], 18 vols. (rpt. edn., Taipei, 1969), 2: 944–45.

<sup>29</sup> The blood oath of violent criminals, messianic cults, and idealistic rebels, in other words, also quickened the emotions of friends bonded within the scholar-elite. See David Ownby, *Brotherhoods and Secret Societies in Early and Mid-Qing China: The Formation of a Tradition* (Stanford, Calif., 1996), 40–42. To a Qing dynasty reader, references to "ancient men of high purpose" would also recall the valor of Ming loyalists. For a discussion of the political complexities of male friendship in the early Qing, shadowed by the Ming loyalist legacy, see Lynn A. Struve, "Ambivalence and Action: Some Frustrated Scholars of the K'ang-hsi Period," in *From Ming to Ch'ing: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century China*, Jonathan D. Spence and John E. Wills, Jr., eds. (New Haven, Conn., 1979).

new questions. What, for example, was the metaphorical language of female bonds, and how did that language differ from its male counterpart? How did sworn sisterhoods differ from brotherhoods? Were the kinship bonds between sisters less fraught than those joining their brothers? How did homosocial bonds—male and female—serve to produce and reproduce gender performance?

We know that both men and women in late imperial times formed bonds reaching beyond the domain of kinship and the domestic sphere. To cite some telling examples: James Polachek has shown how the “aesthetic fellowship circles dominant in Ch’ing examination-elite culture,” especially the Xuannan Poetry Club, provided the framework for new forms of political activism in the nineteenth century. Joseph Esherick’s study of the Boxers describes local cultures where all-male martial arts and sectarian groups came together and flourished.<sup>30</sup> As for women, Dorothy Ko has identified bonds of friendship among female poets, many sustained by exchanging writing rather than personal contact. And novels describe the female networks joining ordinary commoners, including the female pilgrimage societies organized for religious journeys to Mount Tai.<sup>31</sup> Does this mean that whereas male groups moved easily into arenas of political action or violence, women’s bonds propelled them into venues that were primarily literary or religious? Not exactly, for female bonds could be subversive as well. The marriage-resisting sisterhoods of the Canton Delta, and the orgiastic Buddhist female cults who worshiped Guanyin with rites of self-immolation, explicitly challenged the normative Confucian order.<sup>32</sup> This raises the ironic possibility that men’s commitment to the language of Confucian loyalty rendered even their most radical collective bonds less dangerous than those formed by women, who used a language alien to the vocabulary of Confucianism.

In twentieth-century China, political and economic transformations opened new arenas for female bonding, as Emily Honig showed in her study of sisterhoods among female factory workers.<sup>33</sup> Yet public culture in contemporary China remains dominated by structures formed of male bonds. Not only is this true of the government bureaucracy and the Communist Party elite, it is also the case throughout rural China’s villages. In a landmark study of the decades preceding and following the Communist Revolution in the countryside (cited elsewhere in this *Forum* by McIsaac), Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz, and Mark Selden pointed

<sup>30</sup> See James M. Polachek, *The Inner Opium War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 39–61; and Joseph W. Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley, Calif., 1987), 38–67, 216–22. Paul A. Cohen’s recent study of the Boxers analyzes another aspect of Boxer male culture: avoidance of female pollution. See Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York, 1997), 128–45.

<sup>31</sup> Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, Calif., 1994), 179–293; Glen Dudbridge, “Women Pilgrims to T’ai Shan: Some Pages from a Seventeenth-Century Novel,” in *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China*, Susan Naquin and Chün-fang Yü, eds. (Berkeley, Calif., 1992).

<sup>32</sup> See Janice E. Stockard, *Daughters of the Canton Delta: Marriage Patterns and Economic Strategies in South China, 1860–1930* (Stanford, Calif., 1989); and James A. Benn, “Where Text Meets Flesh: Burning the Body as an Apocryphal Practice in Chinese Buddhism,” *History of Religions* 37 (May 1998): 295–318.

<sup>33</sup> Emily Honig, *Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919–1949* (Stanford, Calif., 1986), 209–17.



FIGURE 4: Battle scene from one of a series of late Qing novels celebrating the exploits of sworn brothers who fight to aid righteous officials in bringing criminals to justice. Ink-line woodblock print, color-filled, late nineteenth century, from the publishing house of Yangliuqing, Tianjin. Reproduced in *Zhongguo Yangliuqing muban nianhua ji* [Album of Paintings of China: Yangliuqing Woodblock New Year Pictures], Tianjin Yangliuqing hua she, comp. (Tianjin, 1992), vol. 1: 80.

to an enduring pattern of male dominance in rural China. Above all others, they stressed, the Communist Revolution in the villages empowered violent young men. In their words, “certain strands of violence-prone village culture working through militia, military and a myth of Mao . . . bound tough village males to the socialist state” by making them the primary beneficiaries of revolutionary change.<sup>34</sup> This “macho-military” culture dominated by bonds among young males has in recent years reached from the countryside into the cities through networks of job-seeking male migrants. Male culture has not always dominated rural China. Before the Communist Revolution, informal female networks used gossip to check the behavior of wayward or abusive village men. Margery Wolf’s studies of women in rural Taiwan were the first to identify the power of these female networks, in which mothers and their daughters-in-law minutely discussed and passed judgment on the activities of their menfolk, then used their influence to check men’s abuses, mainly through gossip and shame.<sup>35</sup> After the Communist Revolution, however, collective labor reduced the discretionary time women could devote to either laundry or gossip.<sup>36</sup> This suggests that one unidentified consequence of the revolution in China was the erosion of possibilities for female bonding, and the enhancement of the power of males who forge bonds. Whether this was in fact the case, and whether,

<sup>34</sup> Edward Friedman, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Mark Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State* (New Haven, Conn., 1991), xxiii, see also 271–72, 277–78.

<sup>35</sup> Wolf, *Women and the Family*, 38–52, esp. 40.

<sup>36</sup> William L. Parish and Martin King Whyte, *Village and Family in Contemporary China* (Chicago, 1978), 242–43.

if so, it remains true in the post-Mao reform era, is only one of countless questions raised by the provocative studies of the male bond in this *Forum*.

Studying men, in other words, is not as easy as it looks. In the field of Chinese history, moreover, women's studies can yield at best an incomplete understanding of gender relations, absent a balanced attention to the homosocial bonds that shaped men's culture.

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**Susan Mann** is a professor of history at the University of California, Davis, and past president of the Association for Asian Studies. She is the author of *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (1997) and of the AHA pamphlet *Women's and Gender History in Global Perspective: East Asia (China, Japan, Korea)*, and co-editor of *Under Confucian Eyes: Writings on Gender in Chinese History* (Berkeley, Calif., forthcoming, 2001). Mann is an active participant in the U.C. Davis Cross-Cultural Women's History Program. She is currently working on the history of a family of women writers in nineteenth-century China.



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The Fifth Relationship: Dangerous Friendships in the Confucian Context

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*AHR Forum*  
The Fifth Relationship:  
Dangerous Friendships in the Confucian Context

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NORMAN KUTCHER

OF THE “FIVE RELATIONSHIPS” in Confucianism, the five bonds that men in Chinese society were to observe and promote, it was the fifth, friendship, that was unique. The others, those that bound father and son, ruler and minister, husband and wife, older and younger brother, were overtly concerned with the maintenance of China as a *guojia*, literally a “state-family”—a state modeled on the principles of family organization.<sup>1</sup> They denoted hierarchical, obligatory bonds of mutual devotion that together formed the web of Confucian social relationships that was to provide the source of parallel devotions to family and state. Sons, in the traditional formulation, learned to be capable ministers by turning their devotion to their parents into loyalty to the emperor.<sup>2</sup> The state in turn was modeled on the family, with the emperor’s management of his own family serving as the basis for his running of the state.

Friendship was different. It was neither a family bond nor a state bond, and therefore lay outside the web of parallel devotions that bound these together. Moreover, it was voluntary. One was obliged to serve one’s family (and preserve it by producing offspring) and obliged to serve a virtuous ruler, but there was no requirement that one make friends.<sup>3</sup> Finally, friendship was the one bond that could

An earlier form of this article was presented at the 1996 meeting of the American Historical Association in a panel entitled “The Male-Male Bond in Late Imperial and Republican China.” In preparing the original and subsequent drafts, I have learned much from conversations with several people and in the course of doing so strengthened my own bonds of friendship. I thank the other panelists, who were Lee McIsaac, Adrian Davis, Susan Mann, and Gail Hershalter, and also the audience members present on that day. Steve Angle and Benjamin Fischer kindly read drafts of the paper and offered many helpful suggestions. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Liu Fei-wen and Lin Wei-zen, who pored over baffling passages with me. Finally, I thank Michael Grossberg and Jeffrey Wasserstrom at the *AHR*, and their five anonymous reviewers, for considerable help and encouragement. I bear full responsibility for errors that may remain.

<sup>1</sup> In modern Chinese, *guojia* is defined as nation; in pre-modern usage, as a state, or ruling dynasty. See Zhang Qijun, *et al.*, *Zhongwen da cidian* (Taipei, 1973), 4896.236. Mencius used the term and noted that the basis of the state was the family. *Mengzi xinyi*, in Xie Bingying, *et al.*, eds., *Si shu duben* (Taipei, 1966), 365; *The Works of Mencius*, James Legge, trans. (1895; rpt. edn., New York, 1970), 295.

<sup>2</sup> A comprehensive statement of this worldview appears in the writings of Fang Xiaoru (1357–1402). See Ji Xiuzhu, *Ming chu daru Fang Xiaoru yanjiu* (Taipei, 1991), 18–25. For a discussion of precedents, see also Norman Kutcher, *Mourning in Late Imperial China: Filial Piety and the State* (New York, 1999), 11–18.

<sup>3</sup> It may seem strange to describe the relationship between ruler and minister as non-voluntary, and indeed there was not complete agreement on this matter. In general, though, it was agreed that if the government was virtuous, a son owed it to his parents and to the state to serve. The idea that a minister

be non-hierarchical, and it was this feature that dramatically set it apart from other social relations.

In exploring the character of the friendship bond, and the particular status of friendship in Confucianism, this essay makes several contentions. First, despite the Confucian admiration and respect for friendship, many writers remained deeply wary of it. Friends well chosen could improve one's morality, thereby serving the needs of the state and family. On the other hand, poorly chosen friends tempted one with evil pursuits such as drinking and gambling. They also removed one from the world that was centered on service to family and state. This caution is evident across much of Chinese history. It can be found in the writings of early Confucians, including Confucius himself, but becomes most apparent in the works of later, and in particular Neo-Confucian, writers of the Song dynasty (960–1279) and after.

Second, this essay argues that these Confucian writers were wary of friendship at least in part because of its potential for creating a human relationship that was not hierarchical. So geared was the Confucian schema of social relations around the hierarchical needs of the state-family that equality in friendship was potentially subversive.

Finally, this essay argues that where the possibility of equality in friendship existed in the writings of Confucians, it was undercut by ways of writing about friendship that stressed the fleeting, even momentary, nature of intense, non-hierarchical friendships, or that such friendships were life stages. Those who sought more than hierarchy in human relations were thus offered moments of contentment, while being reminded that such relationships could neither remain stable nor threaten the other more important social bonds. Friendship was thus constructed as the one bond whose function was the service of the others. Having a good friend should make one a better son, brother, or official.

THE GENERAL PLACE OF HIERARCHY in Confucian thought is a subject too complex to be fully dealt with here. It is certain, though, that from the Confucian *Analects* forward hierarchy was essential to the functioning of the Confucian system. It was the common element in the five bonds, the cement that held them together and made them part of a unified system. From the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE), hierarchy was well integrated into cosmological theories by connecting it to *yin* and *yang*, the two elemental forces that underpin the universe.<sup>4</sup> In all things, there had to be an upper and a lower, and this applied to human relations. Good social order meant a father over his son, a ruler over his minister, a husband over his wife, an elder brother over his younger brother, and, perhaps, even a friend over his friend.

Whether that hierarchy amounted to oppression was and is strenuously debated. Early Chinese communists, who sought to free the individual from oppression

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could serve voluntarily was championed by Lü Liuliang (1629–1683). See Wm. Theodore DeBary, *The Trouble with Confucianism* (Cambridge, 1991), 64.

<sup>4</sup> This viewpoint is generally credited to Dong Zhongshu of the Han dynasty, although as Sarah A. Queen has noted, historians have somewhat overstated Dong's contribution to the systemization of *yin-yang* thought. Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-shu* (New York, 1996), 3.

within and without the family, seized on the hierarchical nature of Confucianism as the source of many of China's ills.<sup>5</sup> Others, though, have been quick to point out that the Confucian conception of hierarchy is based not on one-way obedience but on reciprocity and mutual obligations.<sup>6</sup> To this, we may add the view that only the Western-biased mind would see fulfillment in human relations as possible exclusively through equality. Hierarchy, even an obligation to obey, need not be tantamount to oppression. Indeed, the pervasive practice of fictive kinship in China may suggest that people model non-kin relationships on the hierarchy of the family because they find that hierarchy most comforting.<sup>7</sup> Those on both sides of the debate, however, agree that hierarchy is central to Confucianism.

Somehow, in discussions of the Confucian view of human relations, friendship has received little attention. The overwhelming prominence and importance of family ties in China is in part responsible for this silence. However, as the other essays in this *Forum* suggest, relationships between men played an essential role in the society. Much of men's lives were spent in male-only institutions. And because friendship was the only bond in society to be freely chosen, it was potentially the most powerful relationship. It is the Confucian attempt to manage the power of those relationships that is the subject here.

Before proceeding further, several clarifications are in order. First, this essay examines the Confucian attitude toward friendship as expressed primarily in writings that conceptualize the friendship bond within the Confucian schema of social relations, or that offer advice to elite young men on how to choose friends. It deals less with actual friendships, which certainly varied tremendously, and more with how the friendship relationship was conceived within the constellation of human relations and what the ideal type of friendship was supposed to be. Second, these authors I consider wrote primarily for an elite audience. They were not completely disconnected from the world of Lee McIsaac's sworn brothers or Adrian Davis's murderous ones. Confucian essayists wrote, for example, on the dangers of forming sworn brotherhoods.<sup>8</sup> But the men who worked in the factories, coal mines, and on the waterfront docks in Chongqing did not and could not read these essays, which were intended for an audience of elite Chinese males.

Fourth, while this argument begins with Confucius and ends with Confucian thinkers in the nineteenth century, it must be recognized that Confucian writers were the products of their times, and societal developments inevitably affected the ways they conceived of human relations. Attitudes toward friendship changed over time, and as more is written on this topic those differences will become apparent: some are merely suggested here. There were important differences, for example, between the Confucian thinkers of the pre-Song period and the Neo-Confucian thinkers of the Song and after; those who constructed a revitalized Confucianism

<sup>5</sup> See Kam Louie, *Critiques of Confucius in Contemporary China* (New York, 1980).

<sup>6</sup> Tu Wei-ming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (Albany, N.Y., 1985), 139; Lien-sheng Yang, "The Concept of 'Pao' as a Basis for Social Relations in China," in *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, John K. Fairbank, ed. (Chicago, 1957).

<sup>7</sup> As Susan Mann notes, "those who lacked family ties invented them." *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford, Calif., 1997), 139.

<sup>8</sup> Wang Youliang, "Zheng you," in He Changling, et al., eds., *Qing jingshi wenbian* (rpt. edn., Shanghai, 1992), 68.12a.



meant to answer Buddhism's challenge to the Chinese worldview. So the generalizations presented here are no more than just generalizations—true for most, but not all, periods.<sup>9</sup> This was especially the case in historical periods that Confucian thinkers would subsequently describe as decadent. A classic symptom of decadence was human relations, and most particularly the five bonds, out of order. During such periods, even orthodox Confucian ideology was influenced by changed social relations. This caveat aside, there is, by and large, remarkable continuity in writings about friendship, even across a span as long as the one followed here.

One area in which change was evident concerned utility in friendship. Confucians always trod a narrow line when it came to this issue, on the one hand eschewing crass utility or profit in any human relationship, on the other mitigating the power of the friendship bond by making it clear that friendship should serve useful ends for the family and society. Even some of the earliest writings on friendship evidence this tension. The following description offers one of the most idealistic depictions of friendship in the Confucian canon:

[Friendship is] when the Confucian shares an intent and conduct, and when one's achievements bring happiness to the other. Friends do not spurn each other because of higher or lower station, and when they do not see each other for long periods and hear gossip they do not give it credence. They walk together in the path of virtue, and when they share these things they are friends, when they do not, they part. This is the Confucian's way of forming friendship.<sup>10</sup>

Even in this idealistic vision, however, the requirement that friendship be useful is not far below the surface. It is firmly lodged in the notion of shared intent (*hezhi*). For the Confucian, that shared intent is a shared commitment to moral improvement and service of family and state. At the other extreme is another passage from a well-known early text, which states that if one serves one's parents diligently and yet does not enjoy a reputation for filial piety, it is the fault of one's friends.<sup>11</sup> It is a friend's duty to maintain our reputation for filial piety—which is, after all, more important than friendship in the society. An oft-quoted passage from a commentary to a poem in the *Book of Poetry* similarly asserts the utilitarian quality of friendship: "From the emperor to the commoner, all need friends to succeed."<sup>12</sup> Over time, views of the role of utility in friendship changed. Neo-Confucian authors, particularly those of the Song, placed greater emphasis on friendship's role in perfecting morality and serving the state. Confucian writers from the Ming (1368–1644) and

<sup>9</sup> Joseph P. McDermott, for example, notes that the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries witnessed heightened concern with the friendship bond. Some writers during that time, he observes, were able to use friendship as a moral base for the critique of imperial rule. McDermott, "Friendship and Its Friends in the Late Ming," in *Family Process and Political Process in Modern Chinese History*, 2 vols. (Taipei, 1992), 1: 67–96. Wm. Theodore DeBary, in his discussion of late Ming thought, similarly discusses Li Zhi's focus on the friendship relationship as primary. DeBary, "Individualism and Humanitarianism in Late Ming Thought," in DeBary, et al., eds., *Self and Society in Ming Thought* (New York, 1970), 199. And if the work *A New Account of Tales of the World* [*Shishuo xinyu*] is an indication of elite attitudes, there were many writers in the Six Dynasties period who extolled the value of friendship and elevated it above other bonds in the society. Liu I-ch'ing, *A New Account of Tales of the World, with Commentary by Liu Chün*, Richard B. Mather, trans. (Minneapolis, Minn., 1976), 6, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Wang Meng'ou and Wang Yunwu, eds., *Li ji jinzhū jinyi* (rpt. edn., Taipei, 1984), 2.957.

<sup>11</sup> Wang Su, *Kongzi jiaoyu* (rpt. edn., Taipei, 1977), 5.226.

<sup>12</sup> Kong Yingda, ed., *Mao shi zheng yi* (rpt. edn., Shanghai, 1927–36), 9/3.1a.

Qing (1644–1911) dynasties wrote during a period of increased competitiveness and social change. Their essays, it will be suggested, reflected those dual forces.

Third, the notions of hierarchy and equality presented in this essay require explanation. The hierarchy between two friends was neither clear nor absolute; instead, it was complex, at times even negotiated and situational. In a family, position and birth order tended to make hierarchy clear. Between friends, however, differences in such factors as social status, age, learning, and virtue all helped determine hierarchy. One might take as a superior friend a younger man, though he occupied a superior official position, for example. But although hierarchy was complex, it was still essential. Hierarchical differentiation best permitted friends to advance. Even the most idealistic Confucian male sought friendship with one of superior virtue, so that he could become more virtuous, or of superior learning, so that he could become better educated. For the more career-oriented, friendship with a superior meant an easier advancement in one's official life. When friendship was not based on mutual advancement, one possibility was the presence of an equal friendship. Equality, like hierarchy, was neither clear nor permanent, but its presence signaled retreat from the accepted notion that one should focus on advancement by hierarchy—a withdrawal that was dangerous to the Confucian view of human relations. Associated with it were friendships that were based on affection rather than self-improvement.

THAT FRIENDSHIP WAS CONSIDERED POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS is clear from the variety of writings that warned about its power for improving or contaminating the individual. Many authors warned of the contaminating power of friendship through analogies. The well-known expression, "He who touches vermilion will be reddened, while he who touches ink will be blackened," was one way of expressing it.<sup>13</sup> To befriend a man of virtue was to "enter a room fragrant with orchids. After some time one does not smell them [but smells of orchids oneself]." In contrast, to befriend a small man is to "enter a place where fish is smelt. After some time one does not smell the foul odors, but is emitting them."<sup>14</sup>

Confucian writers who discussed *youdao*, the "way of friendship," sought to undercut the power of the friendship bond. While the five bonds were not necessarily ranked, writers made it clear that the fifth and last bond, friendship, was to be kept inferior to the others. Mourning rituals, those all-important signifiers of the relative importance various relationships held in society, mandated that friends not observe formal mourning for each other. One paid condolence calls on the family of a deceased friend, felt sad for the loss of him, but was not permitted to wear the traditional hempen gown on his behalf.<sup>15</sup>

In other ways, too, Confucian writers tried to lessen the power of friendship,

<sup>13</sup> Ouyang Xun, *Yiwen leiju* (rpt. edn., Shangai, 1982), 21.393.

<sup>14</sup> Dai De, *Da Dai Li ji jinzhū jinyi*, Guo Ming, ed. (Taipei, 1975), 205.

<sup>15</sup> In the *Li ji*, one of Confucius's best-known disciples reported that at the grave of a friend he would live in a plain hut but not cry. *Li ji jinzhū jinyi*, 1.84. An exception was in the late Ming, during the time when there was increased interest in the friendship bond. Xie Zhaozhe, *Wu za zu* (rpt. edn., Beijing Xiaoshuo Daguan, n.d.), 14.4343–44. Xie suggests that extremely close friends might mourn as brothers.

particularly when it did not serve the needs of the hierarchical state-family. Society functioned when filial piety (*xiao*—the devotion of child to parent) was transformed into loyalty (*zhong*—the devotion of son to ruler). There was no place for friendship in this equation, save when that friendship might help one serve a ruler or parent. In their arguments, writers stressed that friendship should serve the larger needs of the society or help in the advancement of the individual; it should not serve emotional needs. This perspective on friendship can be traced to the writings of classical authors, although it would achieve much greater force in later periods. In the *Analects*, Confucius steers a middle path, recognizing the emotional aspect of friendship but deemphasizing it all the same. The second sentence of the *Analects* asks, “To have friends coming from distant places—is that not delightful?”<sup>16</sup> At the same time, Confucius is careful to emphasize friendship’s inferiority to other social relations. The text juxtaposes, for example, Confucius’s treatment of the ruler with his treatment of a friend. When the ruler called for him, he left immediately to answer his call without even waiting for his ox to be yoked. But when a friend sent him a gift, even if it were a valuable gift such as a carriage and horses, he would not bow in thanks.<sup>17</sup> Rulers, like fathers, deserved a particular deference—for such hierarchy was basic to the effective functioning of family and state. The only gift for which he bowed was a gift of sacrificial meat, because such a gift served the requirements of ritual.<sup>18</sup> And when the Master twice enjoins his readers to “Have no friends not as good as yourself,” he emphasizes that the purpose of friendship is the individual’s advancement, and indoctrination into the Confucian way.<sup>19</sup> Friendship was to be integrally related to the goals of the state and family, a point made clear by the great Confucian philosopher Mencius.<sup>20</sup>

Neo-Confucians went further in stressing that friendship was only to serve the goals of the individual’s learning of the Confucian way. In their hands, even the second sentence of the *Analects* is drained of its emotional content. For the renowned Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi (1130–1200), the joy in having friends come from afar is one’s personal joy at having his virtue perfected.<sup>21</sup>

In other ways, Neo-Confucians lessened the extent of the friendship bond. The classic record of Han dynasty Confucianism, *The Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall*, had noted that one could share property with a friend, with parents’ consent, and die for a friend, if parents are no longer living.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, mention of friendships in which one friend was willing to die for another are not uncommon before the Song. Thereafter, they all but disappear.<sup>23</sup>

The Neo-Confucian perspective on friendship remained the orthodox position

<sup>16</sup> Confucius, *Analects*, 1: 1.

<sup>17</sup> Confucius, *Analects*, 10: 14, 10: 16.

<sup>18</sup> Confucius, *Analects*, 10: 16.

<sup>19</sup> Confucius, *Analects*, 1: 8, 9: 25.

<sup>20</sup> To paraphrase Mencius: A lower-level official gained the confidence of the ruler by earning the trust of his friends. And he gained the trust of his friends by serving his parents well. Mencius, *Mengzi xinyi*, 371; Legge, *Works of Mencius*, 302.

<sup>21</sup> See Chu Hsi and Lü Tsu-ch’ien, *Reflections on Things at Hand: The Neo-Confucian Anthology*, Wing-tsit Chan, trans. (New York, 1967), 168.

<sup>22</sup> Ban Gu, *Bohu tong shuzheng*, 2 vols. (rpt. edn., Beijing, 1994), 1: 377–78; Pan Ku, *Po Hu T’ung: The Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall*, Tjan Tjoe Som, trans., 2 vols. (Leiden, 1949–52), 2: 562–63. The locus classicus of dying for a friend is the *Li ji*.

<sup>23</sup> These friendships were generally designated by the term *wenxian jiao*. The term appears in

through the dynastic period. Five hundred years later, Weng Fanggang (1733–1818) agreed that the function of friendship was essentially education. He stated that “the *junzi* [or ideal Confucian] takes good care in establishing friendships, for it is through friendship that the temperament is transformed, doubtful interpretations are analyzed, and one’s information is broadened.”<sup>24</sup>

In this view of friendship, writers stressed that care should be taken not to demean oneself when trying to make a friend. In doing so, they hearkened back to a statement in the *Analects* that one owes a friend only a faithful admonition and should not disgrace oneself through overly strenuous efforts to reform him.<sup>25</sup> Intensity in friendship was frowned on, a position epitomized in the well-known Confucian dictum that the friendship of the *junzi* was “as insipid as water, while that of the small man is sugary like rich wine.”<sup>26</sup> And people should not take on other friends as charity cases. For, as Wang Wan (1624–1691) noted, although Confucius’s dictum that one should have no friend not as good as oneself left open the possibility of making a friend by first improving him, only a *junzi* would be equal to that task.<sup>27</sup> This was far indeed from a willingness to share property with a friend or die on his behalf.

In seeking to undercut the emotional power of the friendship bond, Confucians reinterpreted other relevant passages from ancient texts to drain them of their emotional depiction of friendship. A passage from the *Book of Changes* (*I Ching*), for example, reads,

When three people journey together,  
Their number decreases by one.  
When one man journeys alone,  
He finds a companion.<sup>28</sup>

The surface meaning of the text is that intimacy in friendship can only be between two people. As Richard Wilhelm noted of this passage, “When there are three people together, jealousy arises. One of them will have to go. A very close bond is possible only between two people. But when one man is lonely, he is certain to find a companion who complements him.”<sup>29</sup> To Zhu Xi, the passage was a commentary on the changes of *yin* and *yang* lines in the *Book of Changes*, and there is no mention of friendship. The three people journeying together represent three *yang* lines, the

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dynastic histories before the Song, but only once in the *Song History* and never in post-Song dynastic histories.

<sup>24</sup> Weng Fanggang, “You shuo,” in *Fuchuzhai wenji* (rpt. edn., Tongwen tushuguan, n.d.), 10.5a.

<sup>25</sup> Confucius, *Analects*, 12: 23.

<sup>26</sup> This expression appears in the “Biao ji” section of *Li ji*. See *Li ji jinzhū jīnyī*, 2.866. It is also discussed in the “Shan mu” section of *Zhuangzi*. See *Zhuangzi jinzhū jīnyī* (Beijing, 1988), 512; Burton Watson, trans., *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York, 1968), 215.

<sup>27</sup> Wang Wan, “Jiaodao shuo,” in *Yaofeng wenchao* (rpt. edn., Taibei, 1983), 9.18a.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Wilhelm and Cary F. Baynes, trans., *The I Ching or Book of Changes* (Princeton, N.J., 1967), 160. Zhou yi, in *Sishu wujing* (rpt. edn., Beijing, 1985), 37.

<sup>29</sup> Wilhelm and Baynes, *I Ching*, 160.

tendency of which is the loss of one of them; the one man journeying alone represents one *yang* line, the tendency of which is to add a complementary *yin* line.<sup>30</sup>

Writers who sought to undercut the power of friendship argued that it should be kept hierarchical, and they did this chiefly by analogizing the friendship relationship, or basing it on, one of the other hierarchical relationships in the society, such as ruler-minister, elder-younger brother, teacher-student, or husband-wife. In each case, the message is that friendships should be hierarchical, generally to serve the advancement of the individual. With the friendship relationship made analogous to one of the other bonds, a potentially equal relationship was made hierarchical.

One way in which Confucians reinforced the hierarchy of friendship was by stressing that it should be modeled on the inherently hierarchical fraternal bond. This viewpoint is embodied in what is likely the most frequently quoted Chinese proverb on friendship: "When at home, you have your brothers; when abroad, you have your friends." Wang Youliang (1742–1797) discussed this notion extensively in his essay "Correct Friendship." Wang was one of those filial prodigies whom Confucianism lauded. While he was still a child, he was known for the sacrifices he had made for parents and elder brothers.<sup>31</sup> Although the purpose of Wang's essay is to decry the practice of sworn brotherhood, he does so with a lengthy discussion of the relationship between friendship and brotherhood. The essence of his argument is that creating a sworn brotherhood confuses friendship with brotherhood, while actually their natures are parallel. Friendship, he argues, is close to the teacher-student relationship but is closer still to the relationship of brothers.<sup>32</sup> Brothers, like a family of geese, Wang wrote, were naturally to fly one behind the other, in hierarchical formation. This same hierarchically based harmony should apply in the case of friends.<sup>33</sup>

In other ways, too, Wang saw friendship as distinct from and yet parallel to what he considered to be the more important fraternal bond. Elder brothers protect their younger brothers and help them become established in the world. In the same way, superior friends help us become established in the world. Just as a son with no brothers leads a lonely existence, one will not become established without friends. Quoting the well-known dictum on friendship, he wrote, "When at home, you have your brothers; when abroad, you have your friends," and explained: "For men with no brothers, there are none who have established themselves who have not had friends to help them." Friendship must always remain subordinate to brotherhood, however, because while the former represented the will of men, the latter represented the will of heaven.<sup>34</sup>

Friendship constructed as the bond of teacher and student was expressed in a well-known statement in the *Analects*: "When three people move together, surely there is one who can teach me."<sup>35</sup> Indeed, it was when a friend functioned as a

<sup>30</sup> Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei*, Li Jingde, ed. (rpt. edn., Beijing, 1988), 1834. See also commentary by Zhu Xi in *Zhou yi*, 37.

<sup>31</sup> *Qingshi liezhuan* (Beijing, 1928), 72.4a.

<sup>32</sup> Wang Youliang, "Zheng you," 68.12a.

<sup>33</sup> For the *locus classicus* of the brothers' obligation to move hierarchically, like the flight of geese, see the Wang Zhi chapter of *Li ji*.

<sup>34</sup> Wang Youliang, "Zheng you," 68.12a.

<sup>35</sup> Confucius, *Analects*, 7: 22.

teacher that the individual came closest to fulfillment of the Confucian way. Confucians construed friendship as a relationship that would result in self-development—a point of view epitomized in some of the *Analects*' most famous statements on friendship.<sup>36</sup> As Tu Wei-ming has noted, the “way of the friend” and “way of the teacher” were “intimately connected,” and “Friendship as well as the teacher student relationship exists for the sake of communal self transformation. Its purpose is moral education.”<sup>37</sup>

The friendship relationship was also made analogous to the ruler-minister relationship, in which both partners were obliged to offer advice to each other.<sup>38</sup> As one source expressed it, “If the ruler does not admonish his minister, then good government is lost. If the gentleman does not instruct his friend, then virtue is lost.”<sup>39</sup> Analogizing the friendship relationship to that of ruler and minister not only kept the relationship hierarchical, it also drained it of a close emotional bond. The relationship of parent to child was characterized by love (*qin*), while that between ruler and minister was characterized by the still powerful but unemotional righteousness (*yi*). It was the parent-child relationship that was supposed to be the emotional one.<sup>40</sup>

On some occasions, friendship was made analogous to the relationship of husband and wife. In such descriptions, we find what we generally take to be homosexuality. Such friendships were often described by reference to two famous men from the Zhou dynasty (1111–255 BCE) who “loved each other the moment they set eyes on each other,” and whose love is described as that of “husband and wife.”<sup>41</sup> While not a Confucian story per se, the story has Confucian overtones—the friends make contact initially to study together, even though the relationship becomes one in which they “share the same pillow.” For Westerners, many of whom are accustomed to seeing the boundary between “safe” and “dangerous” relationships at the sexual divide, where platonic love (*agape*) becomes erotic love (*eros*), the Chinese case suggests a different boundary. To Chinese authors, such relationships are not dangerous, because they do not upset hierarchical relations. This finding supports current scholarship on Chinese homosexuality, which suggests the centrality of hierarchy. As Matthew Sommer's work suggests, hierarchy, whether of gender or another social relationship, was integrally related to the ways in which homosexuality was popularly perceived.<sup>42</sup> This same focus on hierarchy was noted by Bret Hinsch, who observed that homosexual relationships tended to be described

<sup>36</sup> One such comment began: “Friendships with the upright, the trustworthy, and the learned are beneficial.” Confucius, *Analects*, 16: 4. Another such comment was, “The ideal Confucian gathers friends with learning, and with learning develops his benevolence.” *Analects*, 12: 24. For more analogies of friendship to the teacher/student relationship, see Chen Yaowen, *Tian zhong ji* (rpt. edn., Shanghai, 1991), chap. 20.

<sup>37</sup> Tu, *Confucian Thought*, 139.

<sup>38</sup> See Xiong Gongzhe, ed., *Xunzi jinzhu jinyi* (Taipei, 1975), 568.

<sup>39</sup> Lu Yuanjun, ed., *Shuo yuan jinzhu jinyi* (Taipei, 1977), 93. Zhu Xi makes the same point. Chu and Lü, *Reflections on Things at Hand*, 267.

<sup>40</sup> *Zhuzi yulei*, 262.

<sup>41</sup> For a Song dynasty retelling of the story, see Li Fang, et al., eds., *Taiping Guangji* (rpt. edn., Beijing, 1959), 389.3104; for a Ming retelling, see Chen Yaowen, *Tian zhong ji*, 20.39a.

<sup>42</sup> Matthew H. Sommer, “The Penetrated Male in Late Imperial China: Judicial Constructions and Social Stigma,” *Modern China* 23 (April 1997): 168.

in terms of "social relationships rather than erotic essence."<sup>43</sup> Placing his own findings in the context of those of Hinsch and Sommer, Michael Szonyi finds that, despite what may have been an increasing judicial and literary intolerance of homosexuality in late imperial Chinese society, homosexual practice continued because, in reality, homosexuality was not fundamentally upsetting to the social order when it did not upset hierarchical relations in the society and when it did not interfere with a son's duties to produce heirs. "The understanding of homoerotic desire in Qing society was thus not just a matter of bodies desiring bodies, but involved the relative ages and social positions of those involved, as well as the issue of social and familial responsibilities."<sup>44</sup> Homosexuality was not as threatening to the system as non-hierarchical relationships were.

WARINESS OVER THE FRIENDSHIP BOND intensified over time, as noted above. The position that friendship should be hierarchical seems, like the argument that it should not be an emotional tie, to have become more prominent among Neo-Confucians. Mencius, for example, while connecting friendship with good order in family and state, had explicitly addressed the issue of hierarchy and declared that the only requirement of friendship was that it be maintained with the virtuous.<sup>45</sup> Despite this argument, for subsequent Confucian writers, hierarchy was synonymous with good order. In the competitive atmosphere of the Ming and Qing dynasties, when a successful official career was increasingly elusive, equal friendships were increasingly threatening. To seek equal friendships implied stagnation in social relations and withdrawal from the competition through which men advanced. It was perceived as dangerous for aspiring officials to seek friendship with those who were, like themselves, still commoners. Taken to its logical extreme, such advice amounted to a system of friendship analogous to hypergamous marriage, in which there was tremendous pressure to choose friendship only with one's superiors. Confucians who made such arguments referred back to some of the same passages in earlier texts as their predecessors in the Song, but these passages took on new meanings. Authors began to consider questions such as whether elite youths could befriend commoners. And their focus on the utility of friendship was expressed as advancement in official life, rather than with moral improvement.

One such writer was the well-known Fang Zongcheng (1818–1888).<sup>46</sup> His essay on friendship examined two seemingly contradictory passages from *Mencius*, one that takes a negative view of even honest commoners, because they live by the approval of others, and another that takes a positive view of them, for their refusal to sell

<sup>43</sup> Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley, Calif., 1990), 21.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Szonyi, "The Cult of Hu Tianbao and the Eighteenth-Century Discourse on Homosexuality," *Late Imperial China* 19 (June 1998): 11.

<sup>45</sup> In response to an inquiry on the nature of friendship, Mencius responded, "Friendship should be maintained without any presumption on the grounds of one's superior age, or station, or the circumstances of his relatives. Friendship with a man is friendship with his virtue, and does not admit of assumptions of superiority." *Mencius*, 5: 3 (adapted from Legge, *Works of Mencius*, 140).

<sup>46</sup> Another was Wang Wan (1624–1691), whose writings were referred to above, n. 27.

themselves for the sake of a superior's approval. Fang first reconciles the contradiction by asserting that the commoners to be looked up to, whom Mencius referred to as "the villagers who have regard for themselves," were distinguishable by their willingness to stand up for their principles, even if it meant incurring others' disapproval. Fang continues to argue, however, that when it comes to those who are pursuing an official position, the more appropriate quotation from Mencius is one that advises the scholar to begin with the virtuous scholars in one's villages in making friends. Those aspiring to office, in other words, should not pursue friendship with commoners.<sup>47</sup>

While the competitiveness of Ming and Qing China reinforced and accentuated the hierarchy of friendship, it also led some writers in the opposite direction, toward friendship as a refuge. Such a movement was evident in the writings of Han Tan (1637–1704), an official and scholar from Suzhou. While still suggesting the dangers of friendship with those who are not yet officials, he nonetheless observed that one could have a beneficial friendship with a non-official who, in addition to sharing one's intent, was willing to endure the same hardships (literally, "go through wind and rain night and morning" together).<sup>48</sup> In returning to the idea of sacrifice in a friendship, Han Tan was sliding toward an unhierarchical understanding of friendship. A similar dynamic was at work in the writings of Yu Yue (1821–1907). In an essay on the friendships that should not be discontinued, Yu argued that those made while enduring hardships, while poor, and while traveling, and with those willing to die on one's behalf must always be maintained.<sup>49</sup> Some essays, such as one by Weng Fanggang, whose works are referred to above, maintained a complex view of friendship that was at once idealistic and utilitarian, hierarchical and egalitarian. It evidenced sympathy for the Neo-Confucian emphasis on friendship for the purpose of moral cultivation but also acknowledged the role of friendship in advancing the official career. And it began with the egalitarian view of friendship as being like two hands that must obey each other.<sup>50</sup>

The writings of Weng, Han, and Yu may be indicative of a move toward companionate friendship, akin to the companionate marriage found by Dorothy Ko. She observed a limited rise in this phenomenon in seventeenth-century China, the groundwork for which was laid in the sixteenth, amid the breakdown of traditional notions of hierarchy. Her depiction of the Confucian wariness of companionate marriage applies equally to companionate friendship: "A focus on individual compatibility and emotional needs, however, was the very concern that the Confucian familial system sought to discourage."<sup>51</sup> Friendship, when chosen not for one's advancement in morality or career, might serve as a refuge from the hierarchy of the Confucian system. When writers advocated friendships that were not based on either moral cultivation or career advancement but on enduring hardships

<sup>47</sup> Fang Zongcheng, "Shang you shuo," in *Baitang ji cibian*, in *Baitang yishu*, 18 vols. (rpt. edn., Taipei, 1973), 12: 4.11a-b.

<sup>48</sup> Han Tan, "Qu you lun," in *Qing jingshi wenbian* (Shanghai, 1992), 6.3a.

<sup>49</sup> Yu Yue, "Fanjue jiaolun," in *Binmeng waiji* (Chunzaitang quanshu edn., 1902), 1.14b–16b.

<sup>50</sup> Weng Fanggang, "You shuo," 10.5b.

<sup>51</sup> Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, Calif., 1994), 179.



together, they edged closer to the self-sacrificing forms of friendship not evident since before the Song.

THROUGHOUT CHINESE HISTORY, powerful friendships, particularly those involving self-sacrifice, were often labeled as Guan-Bao friendships. Guan Zhong and Bao Shu were officials of the Zhou period. The basic account of their friendship appears in Sima Qian's *Historical Records*.<sup>52</sup> As childhood friends, Guan and Bao frequently got small jobs together. Because Guan's family was poor, Bao would let him take more of their earnings. As young men, they served competing would-be rulers of the state of Qi. When Guan was imprisoned, Bao came to his help by recommending him to his own leader, the duke of Huan. Bao even went so far as to ensure that Guan was promoted above himself. With Guan's help, the duke of Huan was able to unite the Zhou dynasty under his own leadership.

The lore surrounding the friendship of Guan Zhong and Bao Shu was widespread. In one account, for example, Guan agonizes so over Bao's illness that he refuses to eat or drink.

Once when Bao Shu was sick, Guan Zhong on his account would neither eat nor take water nor broth. As a blood relative he suffered over him. [Critics said], "Bao Shu is sick, and yet your not drinking water or even broth on his account can be of no use to him, and it will also lead to your injury. Moreover, Bao Shu's relationship to you is neither of ruler to minister nor of father to son. On his account to drink neither water nor broth, does this not lose what is right?"<sup>53</sup>

As this quotation indicates, sacrificing one's health for the sake of filial piety or loyalty to the emperor would be acceptable, but friendship never warranted such an extreme action.

Guan Zhong and Bao Shu were equals as friends. They expressed that equality (so accounts of their friendship read) by rejecting in their dealings with each other the hierarchical values their society held dear. When Guan Zhong sacrificed his health to worry over Bao Shu, he subverted the hierarchical values of family loyalty. When Bao Shu sacrificed his career to have Guan Zhong promoted above him, he betrayed his family (to whom he bore the absolute responsibility of success in office) and the competitive system of advancement itself.<sup>54</sup>

In subsequent accounts of Guan-Bao friendship, what marked these relationships was a man's willing sacrifice of either his official position or family obligations for the sake of his friend.<sup>55</sup> In the preface to a poem written during the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420), for example, Vice Censor-in-Chief Fu Xian celebrated his friendship with Lu Hongji, an official who occupied the important post of

<sup>52</sup> For a translation, see Evan Morgan, *A Guide to the Wenli Styles and Chinese Ideals* (London, 1912), 118–27.

<sup>53</sup> Wang Qinruo, *Cefu yuangui* (rpt. edn., Taipei, 1967), 881.10432.

<sup>54</sup> The foregoing of career success is at the center of another well-known friendship, that of Chen Zhong and Lei Yi, who lived during the second century CE. When Lei Yi passed the governmental examination, he sought to yield it to Chen Zhong, but he was not permitted to do so by the examiners. Following their refusal, he feigned madness, and in the end both men were awarded the degree.

<sup>55</sup> For examples of Guan-Bao friendship, see *Pianzi leibian* (1727 edn.), 166.9b. For discussion, see Chen Yaowen, *Tian zhong ji*, 20.22a–23a.

Frontrider to the Heir Apparent. Through a court intrigue, Fu had been disgraced in office. Rather than shunning his friend, Lu brought his case to the heir apparent. In the poem, Fu wrote, "Contented in the affection of my friend / I yearn to follow in the enduring footsteps of Guan and Bao."<sup>56</sup>

In finding the basis for such relationships, writers such as Fu Xian referred back to the fraternal bond. Guan-Bao friends were described as *tongsheng*, literally, as born together. The phrase had two meanings. First, it meant "having the same father," that is, as if the friends were actually brothers. Second, it meant as if born "in the same year." Thus, although their relationship had the power of brotherhood, it could surpass that relationship by achieving equality. Brothers were born one after another, and so there had (even in the case of twins) to be an older and a younger brother. Guan-Bao friends were like brothers who were of identical ages and therefore equals.<sup>57</sup>

The Guan-Bao friendship would seem to be the clearest example of a dangerous friendship, because of its power to subvert the hierarchical basis of Confucian human relations. Yet it somehow managed to remain an expression of orthodox friendship, and writers describe friendships as Guan-Bao with no sign of disapproval. The explanation for this seeming anomaly lies in the story of Guan Zhong and Bao Shu itself. All who knew the classical allusion understood that their friendship was that of young men; later, they grew apart, and Guan Zhong went on to be a famous, friendless official who put his career second to no one. Late in life, when Guan Zhong was sick, the duke of Huan asked him who should take his place, proposing Bao Shu. Guan Zhong praised Bao Shu but went on to say he would be inappropriate for the job, thus revealing that, in the end, loyalty to his ruler is more important than friendship.<sup>58</sup> Guan-Bao friendship is portrayed as a life stage, and in most cases a single act of sacrifice, on the way to becoming a mature individual. When friends later went on to act in their own interests, it was not considered betrayal of friendship but life course—loyalty to the ruler overpowering loyalty to the friend. In the Guan-Bao friendship of Song Sheng and Li Biao, for example, Song Sheng sends his friend and subordinate official to an undesirable post, to avoid showing favoritism.<sup>59</sup> By describing a friendship that would ordinarily threaten the system as Guan-Bao, Confucian discourse gave expression to friends' desires for equality. At the same time, that discourse limited those relationships by implying that Guan-Bao friendships were merely life stages or even single actions of self-sacrifice.<sup>60</sup>

In other ways, too, discourse that admitted the possibility of equality in friendship simultaneously worked to limit its extent. Consider, for example, the well-known literary allusions describing intense friendship. These tend not to celebrate, or even

<sup>56</sup> Fu Xian, "Ganbie fu," in *Fuzhongcheng ji*, in *Han Wei liuchao baisanjia ji* (rpt. edn., Taipei, 1963), 2a.

<sup>57</sup> *Zhongwen da cidian*, 3372.70. For descriptions of Guan-Bao friends as *tongsheng*, see Fu Xian, "Ganbie fu," 2a; and Shen Yue, *Song Shu* (rpt. edn., Shanghai, 1994), 93.295.

<sup>58</sup> W. Allyn Rickett, trans., *Guanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China*, vol. 1 (Princeton, N.J., 1985), 383.

<sup>59</sup> Wei Shou, *Wei shu*, in *Ershiwu shi* (Shanghai, 1986), 62.160.

<sup>60</sup> Guan-Bao friendships might be purged of their subversive qualities in other ways. In one instance, filial piety was noted as ultimately taking precedence over Guan-Bao friendship. Fan Ye, *Hou Han shu jinzhū jinyi*, Zhang Huikang and Yi Mengchun, eds. (rpt. edn., Changsha, Hunan, 1998), 311.879.

describe, enduring relationships of equality. Instead, they describe the unfulfilled longing for friendship, for a true equal, or even for true understanding as a fleeting moment. One such allusion, from the *Book of Songs*, is to the mournful cry of the bird in search of its companion.<sup>61</sup> Another, from the *Record of Rites*, is to the quest for the *zhiyin*, the one who hears the same resonance in a musical note as his friend. Both seem to describe unfulfillment, a relationship that is unattainable or does not persist, instability.<sup>62</sup>

This instability was also evident in friends' literary exchanges. The main genre for the expression of affection between males, for example, was the *songbie* poem, written upon a man's departure to a far-off place, usually on official business. Here, what is relevant is that the expression of friendship becomes most possible when the men are taking leave of each other. It is thus a celebration of what is already changing. At faraway posts, they will remain friends but most likely will not be able to make sacrifices for each other. The *songbie* genre, moreover, reaffirms the primacy of loyalty to the state, as it celebrates friendship. It is, after all, one's (implied) more important official duties that are taking one away from one's friend.

THIS ESSAY HAS SUGGESTED some of Confucian authors' wariness about the friendship bond. Friendship could be accepted, so long as it was subordinate to and supportive of the other relations in society. To accomplish this, it was to be kept hierarchical. Hierarchy in friendship helped reinforce hierarchy in other social relations. When a young man treated older friends with deference, he reinforced an important source of social cohesion: the respect for elders. Hierarchy was also the means by which the society advanced. When a young man treated his social superior with deference, he enhanced his own opportunities and, by extension, promoted the welfare of his family.

This essay has also allowed us to explore the qualities of friendship, and even the category of human relationship dubbed as friendship, in China; something that has not been done before. Utility, for example, was always a part of friendship in China, even while crass utility was eschewed and even if the ends of friendship differed over time. And it was utility that made for the highest forms of friendship, those that ultimately bolstered the family and the society. How different this was from Aristotle's notion of friendship, which shunned friendships based on utility as merely incidental.<sup>63</sup>

I conclude with a question posed to me by a reader of an earlier version of this article, who asked, if Neo-Confucians were so concerned with the potentially deleterious effects of friendship, why did they not recommend that men do away with it entirely? The answer has to be that this could not be done because many in

<sup>61</sup> "Fa mu," in *Shi jing* (Changsha, Hunan, 1993), 310–11; "The Woodman's Ax (165)," Arthur Waley and Joseph R. Allen, trans., *The Book of Songs* (New York, 1996), 137.

<sup>62</sup> *Zhiyin* appears first in the "Yue ji" section of the *Li ji*. *Li ji jinzhu jinyi*, 2.611. On such a use of *zhiyin*, see Gong Kui, "Da Chen Huazhong," in *Yunlin ji* (Siku Quanshu zhenben Series 3, vol. 278, 1972), 4b.

<sup>63</sup> "Now those who love each other for their utility do not love each other for themselves but in virtue of some good which they get from each other." *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII.3. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, David Ross, trans. (New York, 1925), 195.

the society hungered for friendship, for the joys it provided, and for the relief it offered from the demands of living in a *guojia*, a state-family. If it could not provide the "haven of egalitarianism" it does in modern Greece, it could at least be a "sentimental alternative to maternal love and the amity of kinship."<sup>64</sup> And the friendship relationship, properly managed, could serve the needs of the state-family. The conceptualization of male friendship in China was, functionally speaking, geared toward the management of relationships between men. Friendship had its potential for good, but it was a dangerous human relationship.

<sup>64</sup> Evthymios Papataxiarchis, "Friends of the Heart: Male Commensal Solidarity, Gender, and Kinship in Aegean Greece," in Peter Loizos and Evthymios Papataxiarchis, eds., *Contested Identities: Gender and Kinship in Modern Greece* (Princeton, N.J., 1991), 158.

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**Norman Kutcher** is an associate professor of history at Syracuse University, where he has been working since 1991. He is the author of *Mourning in Late Imperial China: Filial Piety and the State* (1999), as well as "The Death of the Xiaoxian Empress: Bureaucratic Betrayals and the Crises of Eighteenth-Century Chinese Rule," published in the *Journal of Asian Studies* 56 (1997). This essay on friendship grew out of a longstanding interest in the subject; another gender-related interest is in Chinese eunuchs. His current primary research project is the Yuanming Yuan, the beloved residence of Qing emperors that was destroyed by an allied expedition of the British and French in 1860.

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# RITUAL EXPOSURE IN ANCIENT CHINA

EDWARD H. SCHAFER

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

## I

### RITUAL EXPOSURE IN SHANG AND CHOU RAIN-MAKING

In 1936 the Chinese scholar CH'ÊN Mêng-chia 陳夢家 published an article entitled "Myths and Witchcraft during the Shang Period."<sup>1</sup> A section of this article (pp. 563-566) is devoted to an investigation of a rain-making ceremony called *ch'ih* 赤, known from the Shang oracle bones, and is outlined in what follows.

The rite *ch'ih* is equated with procedures mentioned in Chou texts as *p'u wu* 暴巫 "exposing the shaman," and *fên wu* 焚巫 "burning the shaman." Professor CH'ÊN cites numerous texts from the bones in which *ch'ih* appears as a verb, frequently with a personal name as its direct object, this name being taken to be the name of a shaman or shamaness.

The graph *ch'ih* 赤 is originally 交 and 火 united to form □<sup>a</sup>, or alternately the upper element is different and the graph appears as □<sup>b</sup>.<sup>\*</sup> Professor CH'ÊN regards both of these forms as representations of a human figure standing in flames, with sweat running down. As for the meaning of the word, it is roughly synonymous with *lu* 露 "to expose" or *lo* 裸 "to strip naked."

Now the *Li chi* 禮記<sup>2</sup> tells the story of Duke Mu of Lu and Hsüan-tzŭ 縣子. The former, concerned about a drought in the land, asked Hsüan-tzŭ whether he should expose a *wang* 炀 to bring rain.<sup>3</sup> The expression used is *p'u wang* 暴炀. The term

<sup>1</sup> "Shang-tai-ti shên-hua yü wu-shu" 商代的神話與巫術, *YCHP* 20 (1936). 485-576.

<sup>\*</sup> The boxes with superscribed letters refer to the table at the end of the article, where archaic characters, *Shuo wên* seal characters, and pseudo-modern characters (by analogy from Shang forms) may be located.

<sup>2</sup> "T'an kung" 檀弓 b.18a (edition of *Ssü-pu ts'ung-k'an* 四部叢刊).

<sup>3</sup> WANG Ch'ung 王充 discusses this passage in the chapter of his *Lun Hêng* 論衡

*wang* will be discussed below; here it may be regarded as related to *wu* 巫 “shaman.” In the chapter *Ch'iu yü* 求雨 of the *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu* 春秋繁露 a great number of procedures for relieving a drought are listed. Prominent among them, for bringing rain in the spring or autumn seasons, is the ceremony *p'u wu*.<sup>4</sup> The story of the Ch'i philosopher Yen-tzū 晏子 also tells of this rite.<sup>5</sup> The tale goes that after a long drought in the state of Ch'i, Duke Ching 景公 asked Yen-tzū whether he should not sacrifice to the spirits of the mountain and river. Yen-tzū replied that since these deities were obviously unable to protect their own realms from the drought, the duke's prayers would be of little avail. Instead he recommended that the duke leave his palace and expose (*p'u-lu* 暴露) himself in the fields. The duke did so, remaining in the wilderness for three days, whereupon it rained.

In the *Tso chuan* 左傳 a somewhat more drastic procedure for effecting the same result appears. Here, during a severe drought in his state, the Duke of Lu suggests burning a shaman.<sup>6</sup> In this case the duke's advisor recommended against reviving this old ceremony.

Professor CH'ËN interprets all the above cases of exposure as meaning baring the person to the blazing sun, to bring rain by provoking the sympathy of the spirit world. A ring of fire or a pyre, in the midst of which stands the supplicant, is an additional feature of the ritual, or an optional one. So it was also

entitled “Ming yü p'ien” 明雩篇 (15.163 of *Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'êng* 叢書集成 edition). His version of the story differs in a few of its details from the present *Li chi* version. For instance, he has *wu* instead of *wang*, and has the Duke ask Hsüan-tzū about the feasibility of “shifting the markets” as an alternative to the exposure ritual. This part of the tale does not appear in the *Li chi* in its present form.

<sup>4</sup> Tung Chung-shu 董仲舒 *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu* 16.3a, 5b (edit. of *Wu-ying-tien chü-chên-pan ch'üan-shu* 武英殿聚珍版全書). A book by an unknown author has been reconstructed from these and other citations, with the title *Ch'ing-yü chih-yü shu* 請雨止雨書, published in the *Yü-han-shan-fang chi-i-shu* 玉函山房輯佚書 by MA Kuo-han 馬國翰 (1794-1857). The work, mentioned in the *Han shu*, originally had 26 *chüan*.

<sup>5</sup> *Yen-tzū ch'un-ch'iu* 晏子春秋 1.8b (edit. of *Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'êng*, hereafter abbreviated as *TSCC*), or citation in *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 太平御覽 11.6b.

<sup>6</sup> Hsi Kung 僖公 twenty-first year (639 B.C.). The text has *fên wu wang* 焚巫尪, usually taken to mean “burn the shaman(s) and the cripple(s),” but *wu-wang* may be an old binom.

with the Shang ritual called *ch'ih*. The *wang* frequently mentioned in the same connection are described in the dictionaries and commentaries as deformed men. These were ritual incarnations of the drought demon *han-po* 旱魃. Exposing such a person symbolized the exposure of the demon himself. A certain functionary with exorcistic duties, described in the *Chou li* 周禮, had the title *ch'ih-po-shih* 赤友氏.<sup>7</sup> In a *Shuo wen* 說文 citation this takes the form 赤魃氏. This was the man in charge of the ceremony of exposing the demon, or the masked dancer who represented him. In Professor CH'ÊN's opinion, the *fang-hsiang-shih* 方相氏 of the *Chou li* was a shamanistic official of the same type. Moreover the *wu*, the female shamans, masqueraded as drought demons, or, more properly, as undifferentiated drought-rain spirits. To expose them was to expose the rain-controlling spirit. That the *han-po* was conceived as a feminine spirit is shown by the graphic forms of its alternate names: *nü-po* 女魃 or 女媧, and also *han-mu* 旱母 "drought mother."

Professor CH'ÊN has shown that women, in fact, were frequently the central figures in the Shang rain ceremonies. He gives the names of three of them found engraved on the oracle bones as "seeking rain" or "suffering exposure." They are the female shamans Yang □<sup>c</sup>, Fang □<sup>d</sup>, and Fan □<sup>e</sup>. Ladies Yang and Fan are probably to be identified with the Wu Yang 巫陽 and Wu Fan 巫凡 of later legend.<sup>8</sup>

The graph □<sup>f</sup> found on the bones, showing a woman with shell decorations on her head standing in fire, should probably be identified with the later form 禁, an exorcistic ceremony of the *Chou li*, and represents the word *yung*. This word is defined in

<sup>7</sup> In some texts enlarged to 扞拔, making a binomial verb out of a verb-object construction. *Ch'ih* 赤 is archaic \*t'jāk (KARLGREN), with which compare 炙 \*tjāk "roast." Related seem to be a number of words meaning "to expel; remove; reject; etc."—concepts suggesting the exorcistic power of fire: 扞 \*t'jāk "expel"; 赦 \*sjäg "liberate"; 釋 \*sjäk "loose"; 寫 \*sjäg "remove"; 瀉 \*sjäg "drain off"; 謝 \*dzjäg "renounce"; 柞 \*tsäk "clear away trees" (possibly). An etymon of the type \*DZIAG "expel; burn away" is indicated.

<sup>8</sup> A number of personages with the "surname" (actually a title) *wu* 巫 survive in legend. They are variously described as ancient diviners, ancient physicians, and even ministers to the Shang kings. It would appear that they may have been shamanistic women of high importance to the state in religious observances.



Hsü Hsüan's 徐鉉 edition of the *Shuo wên* as an exorcistic ceremony against various natural calamities, including drought. Now *yung* basically means "to enclose or encircle an area for sacrificial purposes," and evidence shows that *ying* 嬰 means "to wind around, encircle," hence the Shang graph □<sup>f</sup> is interchangeable with 榮.

The bones also have a graph □<sup>g</sup>, showing a human figure wearing a breast ornament, perhaps of jade, and standing over a fire. Professor CH'ÊN suggests that this may show a shaman with the rain-compelling jade on his breast. In this connection Professor CH'ÊN discusses the related form □<sup>h</sup> which, like *ch'ih*, signifies a rain-making rite. He believes that the character may have had an alternative reading *nan*, on the basis of the series 燠 *jan*/*\*ńziän*/Arch. *\*ńjan* "burn," 赧 *nan*/*\*ńan*/Arch. *\*nan* "redden," and 暵 *nan*/*\*ńan*/Arch. *\*nan* "red"; "warm and damp."<sup>9</sup>

## II

### POST-HAN EXAMPLES OF RITUAL EXPOSURE

Professor CH'ÊN's study of the ceremony of exposing the shaman applies particularly to the Shang era, with Chou literary material adduced as evidence for his hypotheses, and as indica-

<sup>9</sup> The word *nan* 難 belongs in this series, in the meaning of "to exorcise." In this sense it has the alternative reading *no*/*\*nâ* (Archaic *\*nâr*), sometimes represented by the enlargement 儼. The primitive in this whole series (奠) has the old forms □<sup>v</sup> or □<sup>w</sup> (see *Grammata Serica*), a humanoid with what appears to be a kind of headdress. Paul K. BENEDICT (see his "Semantic Differentiation in Indo-Chinese, Old Chinese 蠟 *láp* and 儼 *ná*," *HJAS* 4(1939).228, 229, note 1 suggests the semantic development "sickness" to "demon of sickness" to "ceremony for exorcising the demon" for 儼. He compares the almost universal Tibeto-Burman root *\*na* "sickness," which also exists in a Thai language (Ahom), and has relatives with final -n (e. g., Old Burmese *yan* "venomous; fever"; Shan *ngan* "poison; malarial fever"), and with final dental (e. g., Old Tibetan *nad* "disease"; Old Burmese *\*nat* "demon"). He also notes the alliance of the concepts "hot" and "sickness" in such words as Tibetan *tsha-ba* "heat," and *tsha* "illness," and Chinese 瘟 *\*uən* "epidemic" and 溫 *\*uən* "warm." The semantic link is, in his opinion, "fever." As an alternative, I would suggest that epidemics follow in the wake of droughts, the work of the sun (or sun-deity as drought-demon), and the meaning "hot" may become attached in this way. CH'ÊN Mêng-chia, in *op. cit.*, 561, states his belief that the *no* ceremony was originally a rain-making rite.

tive of the survival of the custom into later centuries, even if only rarely and suffering the displeasure of the philosophers. After the Chou dynasty the female shaman, with a few striking exceptions, was forced into *sub rosa* channels for the practising of her magic arts, analogously to the witch of medieval Europe. When the empire was threatened with a calamity of supernatural origin, therefore, the shamaness was replaced in the performance of the spirit-coercing rites by other functionaries. The material cited below shows that the ceremony of exposure did in fact survive beyond the feudal period, although the central figure was rarely a woman. At the same time, ritual burning survived as an independent method of inducing the rain to fall.

A text of the fifth century preserves the story of an official of the second century who revived the ancient ritual to end a serious drought.

The *Ch'ang-sha ch'i-chiu chuan* says, "CHU Liang 祝良, *tzü Chao-ch'ing* 召卿, was mayor of Loyang 洛陽令. That year there was a severe drought, and the Son of Heaven prayed for rain without success. Liang thereupon exposed his person (*p'u shên* 曝身) in the staired court, demonstrating his sincerity and drawing the blame [on himself] from morning until noon. The purple clouds rose in piles, and the sweet rain fell forthwith."<sup>10</sup>

Here the old ritual is altered in meaning and performance through the domination of the Confucian view of life. The performer is not a shamaness, but a secular official, representative of the Son of Heaven, and his sacrifice is interpreted as the assumption of guilt for the drought, in accordance with the doctrine that administrative errors provoke natural calamities.

Also from the Later Han dynasty is the story of the mass exposure of the court officialdom in the year A. D. 87.

All the court officials exposed [themselves] and prayed for rain.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> LIU Yü 劉彧, *Ch'ang-sha ch'i-chiu chuan* 長沙耆舊傳 quoted in LI Tao-yüan 酈道元, *Shui-ching chu* 水經注 15.11b (edit. of *Wu-ying-tien chü-chên-pan ch'üan-shu*). The same tale, slightly abbreviated, is cited in *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 11.5b. It also appears in *Shuo fu* 說郛 1a, but here the official has the name LIU Shou 劉壽; the story is otherwise identical with the other versions, except that in this edition the Son of Heaven is identified as Shun Ti 順帝.

<sup>11</sup> HSIEH Ch'êng 謝承, *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 1.12b (in *Ch'i-chia Hou Han shu* 七家後漢書). This work is reconstructed from citations in *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* and other sources. In *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* the reference is 11.3b.

In the early part of the third century, YING Ch'ü 應璩 of the dynasty of Wei 魏 wrote a letter to a friend mocking him for the devices he employed in order to obtain rain. This sceptic alludes to the custom of the people of "exposing their bodies" (躬自暴露) for this purpose.<sup>12</sup>

In the fourth century the Buddhist monk Fo-t'u-têng 佛圖澄 was a notable at the court of the rulers of Later Chao 後趙, where he won great regard as a wonderworker—indeed, his activities resembled those of a Taoist adept more than those of a pious follower of the Buddha. During the reign of SHIH Hu 石虎 the kingdom suffered from a prolonged drought. The priest was called upon to exercise his talents, and he forthwith proceeded to a shrine and

. . . bowing his head, he exposed (*p'u-lu* 暴露) [himself]. Immediately two white dragons descended upon the shrine, and the rain fell over an extent of several thousand *li*.<sup>13</sup>

In the fifth century there was the remarkable instance of the exposure of a woman in the state of Northern Yen 北燕. This was the year A. D. 423, after a rainless spring. The wife of a certain official, WANG Hsün 王荀, gave birth to a monster, which disappeared (we are told) from under the very eyes of the birth attendants.

Thereupon they exposed Hsün's wife on the earth-altar (社), and a widespread saturating rain fell.<sup>14</sup>

Here the tale follows more closely the ancient notions of the sources of a drought. The prodigy (*yao* 妖) borne by the unfortunate Mrs. WANG was identified with the drought demon,

<sup>12</sup> YING Ch'ü, *Yü Kuang-ch'uan chang Ts'ên Wên-yü shu* 與廣川長岑文瑜書 (Ying Hsiu-lien chi 應休璩集 5a in *Han Wei Liu-ch'ao pai-san-chia chi* 漢魏六朝百三家集).

<sup>13</sup> Biography of Fo-t'u-têng in *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 11.5b. Fo-t'u-têng was a native of India and came to China in A. D. 310. His biography may also be found in *Chin shu* 晉書 95.10b. Here he is also described as ending the drought by a rain-making rite, but his exposure is not alluded to. The same form of the story appears in his biography in *Kao seng chuan* 高僧傳 9.385b (*Taishō Tripitaka* 50).

<sup>14</sup> KAO Lü 高閭, *Yen chih* 燕志, quoted in *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 11.4b. This work is not available in the original, but the biography of its author may be found in *Wei shu* 魏書 54 and in *Pei shih* 北史 34.

*han-po*, and the lady was exposed in lieu of the monster, just as the shaman who once impersonated it was exposed in the great rain ceremony.

Even the emperor himself might act as the chief celebrant. The monograph on rites in the Sui History tells us that

In cases when it does not rain within twenty days of the initial request, one shall shift the market and prohibit butchering forthwith. The emperor shall wear white clothing, leave the chief palace, reduce his consumption of food, and do away with music. He may sit exposed (或露坐) as he administers affairs of state.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly the T'ang emperor, Hsüan Tsung 玄宗, during a drought in the north of China in A.D. 723,

. . . personally prayed for rain in the palace; he erected an altar, and stood exposed on a mat for three days.<sup>16</sup>

In the middle of the seventh century, the prefect of P'ing-chou, T'ien Jên-hui 平州刺史田仁會, exposed himself and was successful in ending a drought with a heavy rainfall.<sup>17</sup>

CHOU Ch'ih 周焜, writing of the drought of A. D. 814 in his *Han tz'ü* 旱辭, names three procedures for bringing rain:

. . . to expose shamans in the sun (暴巫于日), shift the markets to new places, make dragon images of mud . . .<sup>18</sup>

Outside of the orthodox rites for averting disaster to the realm, then, the shamans persisted, functioning in the same roles that had been officially theirs many centuries before.

Among the people, particularly in the country districts, we should certainly expect the ancient habits for meeting crises to continue in their primitive forms. That such was the case with rain-making in China is shown by a text of the twelfth century. SHAO Po 邵博, in his *Wên-chien hou-lu* 聞見後錄, writes that

<sup>15</sup> *Sui shu* 隋書, "Li-i chih" 禮儀志 7.2b.

<sup>16</sup> *T'ang shu* 唐書, "Wu-hsing chih" 五行志, 35.6b. The same event is recorded, in slightly different language, in *Ts'ê-fu yüan-kuei* 冊府元龜 144.12b. In both cases "stood exposed" is *p'ü li* 暴 (or 曝) 立. Cf. Hsüan Tsung's own account in his "Hsi yü fu" 喜雨賦, in *Ch'üan T'ang wen* 全唐文 20.1b. His language is 暴立炎赫三日爲期.

<sup>17</sup> *T'ang shu* 197.4a.

<sup>18</sup> *Ch'üan T'ang wen* 739.25a.

Between the Fèn 汾 and the Chin 晉, when praying for rain, they are stripped naked (*lo-t'an* 裸袒), and wave their arms, making back-and-forth gestures with their hands . . .<sup>19</sup>

Another imperial rain-making ceremony is recorded for the year A. D. 1370. In the sixth month of that year, after a long drought,

T'AI TSU (of Ming), wearing white clothes and grass sandals, went out on foot to the altars of the mountains and rivers. He laid down a straw mat and sat exposed (露坐). By day he was exposed to the sun (晝曝於日) and did not move for an instant; by night he lay on the ground, and did not loosen the girdle of his garment. . . . Finally, after three days, there was a heavy rainfall.<sup>20</sup>

The Ming scholar, T'U Lung 屠隆, in his *Tao-yü chi* 禱雨記, writes that during a drought in A. D. 1578, being concerned about the plight of the people, he

. . . exposed himself under the hot sun in an inner courtyard from dawn to dusk . . .<sup>21</sup>

That literal "exposure" still survives in China as a method for inducing rain is revealed in a story related to me by Professor T'ANG Yung-t'ung 湯用彤. He recalls from his childhood in Kansu that he was told that a local "sorceress" set about to bring an end to a drought by actually stripping herself naked.

One of the central problems of the present study, and one of the least susceptible of solution, is the problem of what actually was involved in the exposure—did *p'u* mean simply "to stand in the sun," or did it denote "to stand *stripped* in the sun"? One reason for the difficulty is that the use of the word *p'u* was prescribed for the designation of the exposure ceremony, and although other words have been used in common parlance in historical times to signify "naked" unambiguously, they could not be employed to describe the condition of the participant in the rain ceremony, since religious terminology is conservative, and the word *p'u* had been fixed in ritualistic usage by its occurrence in the texts of the Chou period. Professor CH'ÊN believes, on good

<sup>19</sup> *Wên-chien hou-lu* 29.189 (edit. of TSCC).

<sup>20</sup> CH'ÊN Chih-pên 陳治本, *Ming pao hsün* 明寶訓 (cited in *T'u-shu chi-ch'êng* 圖書集成, "Shu-chêng tien" 庶徵典 91.10b).

<sup>21</sup> *Tao-yü chi*, cited in *T'u-shu chi-ch'êng*, "Shu-chêng tien" 94.6b).

ground, that the ancestral ceremony of the Shang era involved actual nudity. Our chief objection to attaching the idea of nudity to the idea of exposure in later periods is the well-known antipathy of the Chinese to exposure of the body. Yet in the folk-custom of Shansi described above, the participants were certainly naked, and the writer could say so, since he had no feeling that he was describing a rite carried out by authorized officials and sanctioned by the canonical literature. There is also the recollection of Professor T'ANG. While it is not possible to prove that the emperors and their agents removed all their clothing, since the ceremony was rare and is not described in detail in official documents, the aversion of the Chinese to nudity is not sufficient reason to rule out the possibility, or even the probability, since it is notorious that customary morality is abrogated in tradition-bound religious rites. At any rate, even if the officials of post-Chou times wore some simple garment (as the white dress of Ming T'ai Tsu) throughout the ceremony, this might very plausibly be regarded as an accretion to the original procedure, as a gesture to modesty, not felt to be necessary in the survivals of the rite in the countryside. The important thing is that the emperor was, in some manner, *exposed*.

### III

#### HAN AND POST-HAN EXAMPLES OF RITUAL BURNING

Just as the ancient exposure ceremony passed from the hands of the female shamans, to be taken over by the male officialdom of Han times and later, so also the old custom of burning the shamaness, last mentioned in the *Tso chuan*, was transferred to the male functionary, and, as will be seen, to the male religious.

TAI Fêng 戴封, an official of the Later Han dynasty, after the failure of the usual prayers to end a serious drought, undertook more extreme measures.

. . . he then piled up faggots, and sat upon them, in order to burn himself. The fire rose, and there was a violent downpour of rain.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *Hou Han shu* 111.7b. The event is also recorded in the *Hou Han shu* of Hsien

It is interesting to note that shortly after this near-sacrifice (in A. D. 90), TAI Fêng was appointed to the office of the T'ai Ch'ang 太常, which was in charge of all matters of magic and divination, employing shamans (*wu* 巫) on its staff.

The case of another Later Han official shows that the burning ritual was a later stage of the exposure ritual, undertaken when simple exposure failed to produce results. The performer on this occasion was named LIANG Fu 諒輔. Anxious to relieve a great drought,

. . . he then exposed himself in the courtyard . . . [sometime later:] then he piled up faggots of firewood and massed water-chestnut reeds together, making a circle of them around himself, set fire to the edge, and was about to burn himself in them . . .

This worthy fellow was saved by a good rainfall, and much admired for his "sincerity."<sup>23</sup>

Our next example is from the Later Liang dynasty (tenth century). A Buddhist monk of a temple in Fukien, I-shou 義收 by name, after a long dry spring,

. . . piled up faggots on the highway, and was on the point of burning himself. When he lifted the torch [to apply to the firewood], the rain fell.<sup>24</sup>

Another monk of about the same period, a native of Ning-hua 寧化, in order to bring a serious drought to an end, built an altar by the side of a "dragon-pool," and declared that if rain did not fall in seven days he would destroy himself (lit. "his illusory body" *huan ch'ü* 幻軀, i. e., his earthly body) by burning.

. . . On the seventh day, as the torch was about to be applied, the sweet rain poured down.<sup>25</sup>

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Ch'êng, preserved in *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 11.3b, and cited in the collection *Ch'i-chia Hou Han shu* 6.1a.

<sup>23</sup> *Hou Han shu* 111.11a.

<sup>24</sup> *Yü-ti chi-shêng* 輿地紀勝 128.18a.

<sup>25</sup> *Yü-ti chi-shêng* 132.9a. Compare with these two accounts the incident of another monk, named Ch'êng-hui 誠惠, who was honored by the Emperor of Later T'ang for his powers over the weather. During a drought in A. D. 923 his efforts proved unsuccessful. The sequel was that ". . . someone told Ch'êng-hui that the monarch proposed to burn him because of the failure of his praying for rain. Ch'êng-hui fled and died of shame." Here the suggested burning appears as a punishment for failure, but the choice of that method was doubtless conditioned by the tradition that

But an emperor too could perform this ceremony. T'ai Tsung of Sung, in the year A.D. 991, when prayers for rain failed to break a drought and a plague of locusts, delivered a message to his ministers, saying, "I propose to burn myself in response to the reprimand of Heaven."

The next day it rained and the locusts perished.<sup>26</sup>

A youthful magician of the twelfth century, bearing the suggestive name of SUN Tao-chê 孫道者, claimed the ability to produce rain by his art. Once on a visit to the local capital,

. . . he saw persons praying for rain without avail. He said, 'Praying for rain is an easy matter. If I pray there will be a response. If not, I propose to burn myself . . .'<sup>27</sup>

Luckily the prayer of the young man sufficed to bring rain, and the more extreme measure was not necessary.

A petty official of P'u-chiang 浦江, AN Yü 安郁 by name, during a drought in the middle fifteenth century,

. . . made a tower of firewood at the Tzū-chi Monastery 紫極觀, and swore that if it did not rain he would burn himself. On the appointed day there was a heavy rainfall.<sup>28</sup> [It will be observed that in this incident, the environment was Taoist rather than Buddhist or Confucian.]

A folktale also tells that CHAO K'uang-yin, who later became the first emperor of the Sung dynasty, needing money for gambling, promised the village headman that he would relieve a severe drought, if he were paid cash for the feat. He had a ring of fire made, and sat on a table in its midst.

He himself never expected anything to happen, but, having a golden tongue and jade words, the Wind Count and the Rain Master, without hesitating, sent a storm of rain at once.<sup>29</sup>

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shamans were burned in Chou times as a punishment—they were sacrificed in the fire for their supposed cooperation (or identity) with the drought spirit. Ssü-ma Kuang 司馬光, *Tzū-chih t'ung-chien* 資治通鑑 272.14a (edit. of Ssü-pu ts'ung-k'an).

<sup>26</sup> *Sung shih* 宋史 5.5b.

<sup>27</sup> *Kuang-tung t'ung-chih* 廣東通志 329.5630a, cited from *Kuang-chih* 廣志.

<sup>28</sup> *Shan-hsi t'ung-chih* 陝山通志, cited in *T'u-shu chi-ch'êng*, "Shu-chêng tien" 96.15ab.

<sup>29</sup> Wolfram EBERHARD, *Chinese Fairy Tales and Folk Tales* (London, 1937), pp. 288-9. This is a story from the *Chu Yüan-chang ti ku-shih*.



In these later examples it is apparent that there is an explicit tendency to regard the burning not so much as a magical rite, but as self-sacrifice for the appeasement of the spiritual world. But it is in this direction that human sacrifice has developed all over the world, from a drama compelling Nature into a personal act of atonement. Often this took the form of a king sacrificing himself for his people—indeed this was the real role of the king. The tradition in China is at least as old as the legend of T'ang 湯, who made his body a scapegoat on behalf of his subjects in order to end the drought.<sup>30</sup> So also was it the case with Duke Ching of Sung 宋景公, who was advised by a diviner to sacrifice a human being to terminate a long drought. The Duke replied that it was fitting that he himself be sacrificed, and the rain fell before he had finished speaking.<sup>31</sup> The ruler, originally a focus of magical power, was becoming a substitute for his people, with the moral obligation of self-sacrifice for them.

It has been noted that in the case of LIANG Fu, the burning rite followed the exposure rite when the latter proved inadequate. There is further evidence of this. The older editions of the *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu* tell of the procedure for bringing rain as follows:

If this does not make it rain, order the shamans to recite their spells, and expose them. If exposing them does not make it rain, pile up firewood on the sacred mountain, beat drums and burn them.<sup>32</sup>

There is a problem of grammatical ambiguity in this passage. The expression *fên chih* 焚之, here translated "burn them," might mean "burn it," namely the firewood (or even the sacred mountain), but as far as can be told from syntactical analysis it might even mean "burn them (i. e., the drums)." The sentence would be as ambiguous in English if we substituted the plural form "faggots" for "firewood." Context and comparison with other

<sup>30</sup> *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* 呂氏春秋, Shun-min p'ien 順民篇 9.2a (edit. of *Tzū-shu pai-chia* 子書百家).

<sup>31</sup> LIU Hsiang 劉向, *Ku lieh-nü chuan* 古列女傳 6.160 (TSCC).

<sup>32</sup> *Ch'ing-yü chih-yü shu*. The edition of *Ch'un-chiu fan-lu* in *Wu-ying-tien chü-chen-pan ch'üan-shu* gives the part of this ceremony concerned with the burning in a quotation from the *Shên-nung shu* 神農書, adding the opinion of the editor that it did not form part of the original text, and he has therefore removed it.

material on rain-making strongly suggest that "them" refers to the shamans.<sup>33</sup> This ambiguity may have been accidental, or the text may have been tampered with to eliminate any suggestion of human sacrifice in ancient China, a possible motive for the exclusion of the passage altogether from at least one of the editions of the *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu*.

The burning ritual was, in all probability, imitative of the action of the sun. (Note that the words used for the exposure ceremony, *p'u* 暴 and *ch'ih* 赤 (□<sup>i</sup>), include as semantic indicators pictures of the sun and a fire respectively. Moreover *p'u* "to expose" has also the meaning "to burn," as shown by the reading *p'u* of *pao* 爆 when the latter graph represents "burn.") Exposure and burning were equally inherent in the word *ch'ih*, as shown not only in the Shang usage of the term, but also in the conventional expression used to describe the earth during a drought: *ch'ih t'u* 赤土 "bare/burnt/red earth." (The meaning

<sup>33</sup> In this connection compare the story in *Yu-yang tsa-tsu* 酉陽雜俎 14.6b: "East of T'ai-yüan chün 太原郡 there is a Mount Yai 崖山. When there is a drought, the natives are accustomed to burn this mountain in seeking rain. Popular tradition says that the spirit of Mount Yai took the daughter of the River Earl 河伯 to wife. Therefore when the River Earl sees the fire he must bring down rain to save her." Fires on mountains, then, are an old method of rain-making. Myths often derive from the plots of lost sacred dramas. It is my belief that the story of the daughter of the river-god may reflect an ancient ceremony in which the divine maiden was impersonated by a shamaness and burned on the sacred mountain. The association between rain-goddesses and mountains is natural, and not otherwise unknown in the Chinese tradition. Particularly noteworthy is the case of the Goddess of Wu Shan 巫山 "Shaman Mountain," celebrated in the rhapsody attributed to Sung Yü 宋玉. In one tradition she was the daughter of the Fiery God (Yen Ti 炎帝, that is, Shên Nung, genius of the element fire according to the theory of the Five Elements). She controlled the rain: "At dawn I am the morning clouds, at nightfall I am the driving rain!" Mount Wu seems to have been the seat of a fertility cult, and a source of love charms, in the state of Ch'u, and was probably named for the shamanesses who practised there, and were identified with the goddess. For further material on burning piles of wood as a sacrifice see Bruno SCHINDLER, "On Travel, Wayside and Wind Offerings in Ancient China," *AM* 1 (1924) 624-656. These were various kinds of fertility rites, for making rain, childbearing etc. See also SCHINDLER, "The Development of the Chinese conceptions of Supreme Beings," *Hirth Anniversary Volume* (London, 1922), pp. 311.n3, where he writes "The sacrifice of burning faggots is, no doubt, to be interpreted as of the well-known smoke sacrifices whereby the smoke rises to become a cloud and, as such, to bring rain." Compare the story of CHU Liang above.

“red” is derivative from “the color of fire.”) The person exposed and/or burned symbolized not only the spirit of drought, but also the earth. While the archaic world-view was still current, the earth was properly female, embodying the element *yin*, subject to fructification or destruction by the sun, the *yang* principle, and the shamaness was exposed like the barren soil to induce the saving rainfall.

#### IV

##### EXPOSURE OF DRAGONS AND HUMAN FIGURES

An alternate form of the exposure ceremony employed, instead of a human being, an image of the rain-spirit itself—that is, a dragon figure, usually constructed of earth. This method was widely used in China. An instance follows.

The diviner LANG I 郎顗, who lived during the time of Shun Ti 順帝 during the Later Han dynasty, in the course of a long recommendation to the court on methods of dealing with national calamities, lists a number of procedures efficacious in causing rainfall. These included the usual prayers, sacrifices to the mountains and rivers, and

. . . the exposure of dragons (*p'u lung* 暴龍), and the shifting of markets.<sup>34</sup>

Sometimes, in addition to the dragons, human figures were exposed, as a substitute for living men. Thus, after a long drought in the year A.D. 759 (T'ang dynasty),

. . . the eastern and western markets were moved. Then sacrifices were made to the Earl of the Wind and to the Rain Master. The Yü-dance (雩) was celebrated, and sacrifices were made at the altars. Human images of mud and earthen dragons were made, and the *wang* (望) sacrifice having been offered to the famous mountains and great rivers, they prayed for rain.<sup>35</sup>

Even as late as the T'ang period shamans were sometimes em-

<sup>34</sup> *Hou Han shu* 60b.7b. One authority believes that the custom originated in the myth of the combat between Ying-lung 應龍 and Ch'ih-yu 蚩尤. The dragon images are supposed to represent Ying-lung. See Kuo Pu's 郭璞 commentary on *Shan-hai ching*. *Shan-hai ching chu* 山海經注 14.3b.

<sup>35</sup> *Ts'ê-fu yüan-kuei* 144.15a. Cf. *Hou Han shu* 15.2a; here, too, rows of earthen figures were used in the Yü ceremony.

ployed in these rites, even officially. Thus a certain LI Kan 黎幹, mayor of the capital city, took the responsibility for ending a drought in the year A. D. 773.

He constructed an earthen dragon, and personally performed a contradance (*tui-wu* 對舞) with the shamanesses and shamans (*wu-hsi* 巫覡).<sup>36</sup>

## V

### EXPOSURE IN FUNERAL RITES (THE *Li Chi*)

Throughout the *Li chi* references are made to a custom which was practised at various stages in the funeral ceremonies of the Chou nobility. This material gives a retrospective and idealized account of "Confucian" rites, and may not describe the actual ceremonies practised at any one time and place during the dynasty, but the references to the custom are so numerous as to leave no doubt of its actual prevalence. At certain prescribed points in the rites, according to the *Li chi*, the mourner bared a part of his body. If we rely on LEGGE's translations, this was the arms or breast. The word which refers to this activity is an intransitive verb, namely *t'an* 袒. Some selections from LEGGE's version of this classic will make the context of the word's usage clear:<sup>37</sup>

. . . when the chief mourner had finished the slighter dressing of the corpse, he bared his breast and tied up his hair with sackcloth.<sup>38</sup>

When the mother of Shu-sun Wu-shu died . . . he bared his arms, throwing down also his cap, and binding his hair with sackcloth.<sup>39</sup>

On the death of his wife's brother . . . with breast unbared and wearing the cincture instead of the cap, he wails and leaps.<sup>40</sup>

(Those who had gone up to the hall then) descend, and go back to their proper places on the east; where all bare the left arms and shoulder.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *T'ang shu* 145.5a.

<sup>37</sup> James LEGGE, *The Li Kî* [= *Sacred Books of the East*, 27, 28]. These two volumes will be referred to as 1 and 2 below.

<sup>38</sup> LEGGE, *op. cit.*, 1, p. 142.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, p. 146.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, p. 164.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, p. 313.

A son, who had hurried to the mourning rites of his father (from a distance), bound up his hair in the raised hall, bared his chest, descended to the court, and there performed his leaping. (The leaping over, he reascended), covered his chest, and put on his sash in an apartment on the east.<sup>42</sup>

All engaged in dressing the corpse had their arms bared; those who moved it into the coffin, had their breasts covered.<sup>43</sup>

In the above quotations, the phrases "he bared his breast," "he bared his arms," "with breast unbared," "bare the left arms and shoulder," "bared his chest," and "had their arms bared" all translate the Chinese word *t'an*. It would appear that LEGGE was embarrassed for a precise translation of the word, but he is simply relying on old commentaries, which treat the term differently from time to time. The general idea conveyed is "to bare the upper half of the body," although this meaning derives only from commentaries, not from context. The verb does not have such grammatical objects as "shoulder," "arm" or "breast" in the Chinese text. If it means "to remove clothing," it *could* connote "to remove *all* the clothing; to strip naked." Further investigation may establish this point. But it is clear at least that the ancient obsequies required the mourner to bare more or less of his body at prescribed intervals. The baring accompanied, usually, an act of leaping, and it need hardly be questioned that both acts had the primitive function, although this may have been forgotten in late Chou times, of exorcising the ghost of the deceased (or possibly of other and unfriendly spirits). In short, this custom belongs with all other kinds of ritual nakedness, whose purpose is the effective release of magical energy. This is made clear by another passage in the *Li chi*:

Some one may ask, "How is it that one with the cap on does not bare his arms, and show the naked body?"<sup>44</sup> and the answer is: "The cap is the most honorable article of dress, and cannot be worn where the body is bared, and the flesh exposed.<sup>45</sup> Therefore the cincture for the head is worn instead

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, p. 58.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, p. 187.

<sup>44</sup> The words from "bare" to "body" inclusive here translate the phrase *jou t'an* 肉袒, which might be more simply rendered "have the flesh bared."

<sup>45</sup> Translating 不居肉袒之體, perhaps better: "... does not belong on a body whose flesh is bared." This expression *jou-t'an* is used of the Shang prince Wei-tzü 微子 when he appeared before the camp of the victorious Chou warlord Wu Wang

of the cap, (when the arms are bared).” And so when a bald man does not wear the cincture, and a hunchback does not bare his arms, and a lame man does not leap, it is not that they do not feel sad, but they have an infirmity which prevents them from fully discharging the usages.<sup>46</sup>

It is credible that on practical grounds a lame man might dispense with leaping, but the avoidance by the bald man and the hunchback of the usual rites is only explainable as fear that the mana of a deformed person might have an undesirable effect. A further deduction is that the cap had the effect of symbolically locking the personal energy in the body. It was a magical cover, with “magical” later converted into “honorable,” as other articles of clothing in most societies from “magical” became “modest.”

Not much is said in the *Li chi* about the mourning customs of women. But a curious passage deserves citation:

The women could not bare the arms, and therefore they (merely) pushed out the breast, and smote upon their hearts, moving their feet with a sliding, hopping motion . . .<sup>47</sup>

The phrase “pushed out the breast” is rather ambiguous. It represents the Chinese *fa hsiung* 發胸, surely meaning something like “put forth the breast (from the clothing),” and not simply “to throw out the chest,” as we say when we mean “to act like a pouter pigeon.” The passage makes sense if we interpret it as meaning that unlike a man, who bares his whole body (or his whole body above the waist), a woman was expected only to part her upper garment, bare her bosom, and beat it in the fashion approved for female mourners elsewhere in the world. This is explainable as reflecting the greater modesty of women as compared with men, doubtless traceable to the greater intensity of their magic power.

武王, bearing the sacred vessels of his dynasty (*Shih chi* 史記, Sung Wei-tzū 宋微子). One commentary explains the phrase as 袒而露肉也 “stripped to expose the flesh.” CHAVANNES renders the passage “son bust était mis à nu . . .,” as reluctant as LEGGE to translate simply “with bared flesh.”

<sup>46</sup> LEGGE, *op. cit.*, 2, p. 378. The “cincture” of hemp was worn at the time of baring the body except when mourning for one’s mother. See *ibid.*, 2, p. 59.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, p. 376.

Traces of other kinds of ritual unclothing may be found in the *Li chi*. Thus,

When he feeds the *San-lao* 三老 and the *Wu-kêng* 五更 in the Great College 大學, the Son of Heaven is stripped (*t'an* 袒) as he carves the meat (*shêng* 牲 'sacrificial animal').<sup>48</sup>

The king assuredly is not stripped to the waist like a butcher for practical reasons, but because this is a ceremonial occasion to which adhere symbolic actions whose meaning, originally sacred, had probably long since been forgotten.

The word *t'an*<sup>49</sup> (\*d'an) 袒 itself has been tentatively defined as "to be bared" or perhaps "to be bared to the waist," or accepting the opinions of certain commentators and lexicographers, "to have an arm bared." Specifically, it is the commentary of CHÊNG Hsüan 鄭玄 (second century A.D.) on a passage in the *I li* 儀禮 (ch. 5) which defines *t'an* as "to remove the garment from the left (arm or side)." In short, *t'an*, in the passage in question, is given a narrow meaning, because the custom involved under the specific circumstances described in the *I li* was known to the commentator. It would normally have been referred to by the phrases *t'an tso* 袒左 or *tso t'an* 左袒. Elsewhere other meanings are given. Thus in the *Tso chuan*<sup>50</sup> we have the passage 袒而示之背, translated by LEGGE:

. . . with this he bared his person, and showed him his back.

In this instance, then, the act of *t'an* involves removing sufficient clothing to reveal the back. The only generalized definition we can obtain from this material is something like "to remove the clothing from the upper half (or more) of the body."

Consulting the dictionaries, we have the usual situation of synonyms being used to define each other. *K'ang-hsi tzü-tien* 康熙字典 gives by way of definition the compound *t'an-hsi* 袒裼, usually taken as synonymous with each of its components.

<sup>48</sup> *Li chi* 11.19b (edit. of *Ssü-pu ts'ung-k'an*).

<sup>49</sup> Pei-p'ing dialect should have *tan*; *t'an* is irregular. *T'an* is regularly an intransitive verb, as I have tried to translate it, in the *Li chi*, but elsewhere is found with an object.

<sup>50</sup> Duke Ting 定公 fifth year.

*Hsi* itself is defined in the *Yü pien* 玉編 (sixth century, with later additions) as meaning *t'an*, and further by "removing the clothes to make the body visible." Contrariwise, in the *Shuo wên*, 說文 \* (or 裸) "naked" is defined by *t'an*. The commentator TUAN Yü-ts'ai notes with some bewilderment that *t'an*, *hsi* and *lo* are all used to explain each other, but ventures the opinion, doubtless based on early commentaries on textual appearances, that *t'an* means "to remove the upper clothes," whereas *lo* means "quite naked," or in his own words "the extreme of *t'an*" (但之尤甚者也). To make matters worse, the commentary on the *Li chi* <sup>51</sup> defines *t'an* by *lu* 露 "to expose."

On the basis of this evidence we can only say with certainty that *t'an* means "to bare or strip (part or all of the body)." Some investigation of the philological implications of this word will be made below. At this point it can be stated that complete or partial exposure of the body was a feature of the funeral rites of the upper classes of Chou-dynasty China, and that the custom is another facet of the general principle of exposure to give power over the supernatural world.

In the appendix to the present study it will be noted that in the classical Mediterranean world, naked feet sometimes substituted for naked body with similar ritual meaning. There are some indications of the same substitution in ancient China. The *Li chi*, in regard to the funerals of rulers and great officers, says,

. . . whenever the presiding mourner went forth (to meet visitors), he had his feet bare, his skirt tucked under his girdle . . . <sup>52</sup>

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\* For this character cf. *K'ang-hsi tzü-tien* (Commercial Press ed., 1938) p. 1256 entry no. 7.

<sup>51</sup> 1.8b. The passage is interesting. LEGGE translates: "Let not the cap be laid aside; nor the chest be bared, (even) when one is toiling hard; nor let the lower garment be held up (even) in hot weather." This should be compared with my comments on *hsiang* 襄 below. Although this passage is supposed to refer to late Chou times, and the other (on *hsiang*) to Han, it is not too far-fetched to suppose that the attitude expressed in the former persisted into Han, and that the removing of the garments when plowing needed a powerful incentive, unless perhaps we assume that two different classes of persons with different mores are referred to.

<sup>52</sup> LEGGE, *op. cit.*, 2, p. 176. The character for the word here translated "bare" is 徒 *t'u*/\*d'uo. This is phonetically and graphically related to *t'u* 土 "soil" and *shé* 社 "altar of the soil," and we may find here some reminiscence of fertility rites. Note



## VI

## EXPOSURE IN OTHER MAGICAL PROCEDURES

Nudity as a ritual act has its place in China in other than rain-making ceremonies. Here as elsewhere it is not that exposure of the body is connected with the weather as such, but it is an act of magic which can operate on any part of the supernatural world, especially one which has to do with the fertility of humans and crops. Some random instances follow.

A legend of Chou times related that two dragons appeared at the end of the Hsia dynasty. A frothy substance (spittle? sperm?) which they left was kept in a coffer, and transmitted through the generations down into the Chou dynasty. This box was opened in the reign of King Li 厲王. The contained substance, the refined essence of the dragon spirits, emerged, and the king felt himself obliged to send for female exorcists to bring the spirits under control. In the words of the *Shih chi*,

King Li had women, stripped naked, cry out at them.<sup>53</sup>

These women were doubtless shamanesses, and their nudity was intended to bring magic power to work on the dragons.

Again, in a fifth-century text, we may read of a Lo-ch'uan 裸川 "Naked River," southeast of Kuei-lin 桂林. Here it was the custom to offer one's cap and gown to the river, hence the name. What magical effect this action was supposed to have we cannot now tell, but it cannot have been mere extravagance.<sup>54</sup>

The *I-chien chih*, a fertile source of folklore for the early Sung period, provides several instances of nudity as a condition of magical operations. In one case, a farmer's daughter disappears and is later discovered under strange circumstances in a mountain cave. She is believed to have been enchanted, and her family

the meaning for *t'u* of "only, but, merely"; cf. *tan* 但 (originally the same as 袒) which has the same meanings. Cf. German *bloss* in its various meanings.

<sup>53</sup> *Shih chi* 4.11b. Cf. *Kuo yü* 國語 16.7a. The text is 厲王使婦人裸而譟之.

<sup>54</sup> JĒN Fang 任昉, *Shu-i chi* 述異記 1.9a (edit. of *Han Wei ts'ung-shu* 漢魏叢書), citing HUAN T'an 桓譚, *Hsin lun* 新論, a Han work.

therefore summons a shaman. The latter proceeds into the cave, holding a sword in his mouth, and dancing the step of Yü. He discards his clothes piece by piece, until he is stark naked. Finally he discovers the girl possessed by a serpent and delivers her.<sup>55</sup> The essential elements for supernatural coercion are all here: the shamanistic step, the magic sword, the nudity of the practioner.

Another tale in the same book tells of two fellow students who visit a selector of lucky days (*jih-chê* 日者). This diviner they found "sitting in a squatting position with his clothes stripped off."<sup>56</sup>

Again, it is related that in Anhui a man built a family shrine to the Wu-t'ung 五通 spirits, and that when making an offering in the shrine, the whole family, including the women, were nude.<sup>57</sup>

Another Sung source tells that in Ch'in-chou 欽州 in Kuang-tung, where the magical potion *ku-tu* 蠱毒 was distilled, one practise necessary for its manufacture was for the women of the household to make a nocturnal sacrifice with loosened hair and naked body.<sup>58</sup>

Formerly at Hang-i 杭邑, where shamanism was popular among the people, a great three-day ceremony was carried out by the shamans, who disguised themselves as supernatural beings. The chief purpose of the ritual was to give fertility to barren women. Of these women the text says:

They are deceived with the theory that they should strip off their inner garments and give them to the shamans, which act is called "Beheading the Baleful Influences." Since the baleful influences are removed, their bodies can become pregnant.<sup>59</sup>

A more recent example of the magical effects of nudity relates to the siege of K'ai-fêng in A. D. 1642. On January 30 of that

<sup>55</sup> HUNG Mai 洪邁, *I-chien ting-chih* 夷堅丁志 20.155 (TSCC).

<sup>56</sup> *I-chien i-chih* 乙 7.52.

<sup>57</sup> Wolfram EBERHARD, *Lokalkulturen im alten China*, Pt. 2, *Die Lokalkulturen des Südens und Ostens*, *Monumenta Serica Monograph III* (Peiping, 1942), p. 37, citing *I-chien chih*. I have been unable to locate this passage in available editions of the original.

<sup>58</sup> CHOU Ch'ü-fei 周去非, *Ling-wai tai-ta* 嶺外代答 10.23a (edit. of *Chih-pu-tsu-chai ts'ung-shu* 知不足齋叢書).

<sup>59</sup> *Shang-hang hsien-chih* 上杭縣志 cited in *T'u-shu chi-ch'êng*, I-shu tien 藝文典 810.7b.

year, the attacking army sent naked women out towards the city wall, and the guns of the defenders were silenced. The besieged in turn despatched naked monks to the parapets, which had the effect of ruining the cannon of the enemy also.<sup>60</sup>

Doubtless further searching would reveal other examples of ritual nudity in China. The instances given above are intended only to supplement briefly the discussion of types of ceremonial exposure consecrated and stereotyped by Confucian orthodoxy. It is not to be expected that the customs of the countryside would gain as much attention from the Chinese literatus as have the venerable traditions of the Chou nobility. But it is to the religious and semi-religious activities of the peasant that we should look for more material on the ancient belief that the exposure of a human being gives him power over the gods.

Finally, I should like to cite a myth, not from China but from Japan, which, it seems to me, illustrates the antiquity of the belief in the spiritual power of nudity, and typifies also the translation of a rite into a legend. The story is from the *Kojiki*. The Sun-goddess Amaterasu, terrified at the ravages of the Storm-god Susano-o, retired into a cave, leaving the world dark. The other gods then called upon Ame-no-uzume-no-mikoto, a deity in the pattern of a shamaness or witch, to do a dance before the cave and induce the goddess to come out. This personage,

. . . laying a sounding board before the door of the Heavenly Rock-Dwelling, and stamping till she made it resound and doing as if possessed by a Deity, and pulling out the nipples of her breasts, pushing down her skirt-string usque ad privates partes . . .<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> LI Kuang-tien 李光○, \* *Shou-pien jih-chih 守汴日志*, 11b (in *Chao-tai ts'ung-shu 昭代叢書*). For other examples see Alide and Wolfram EBERHARD, *Die Mode der Han- und Chin-Zeit* 39 (Antwerp, 1946).

\* For this character cf. *K'ang-hsi tzü-tien* p. 256, entry no. 22.

<sup>61</sup> Basil Hall CHAMBERLAIN, *The Kojiki or 'Record of Ancient Matters,' TASJ* 10 (Supplement, 1906). Dr. Ensho ASHIKAGA has told me that ritual nudity is not unknown in modern Japan. He narrated the instance of the villagers at Fushimi who dance naked at the Inari shrine before rice-planting. This is clearly a rite to induce fertility in the crops. For more on the significance of Ame-no-uzume see especially NAKAYAMA Tarō 中山太郎, *Nihon miko shi 日本巫女史* (Tōkyō, 1930), pp. 236-243, 561-569. Mr. NAKAYAMA produces other evidence of exposure as a ritual act of Japanese shamans, and emphasizes particularly the magical and apotropaic

was able to provoke laughter among the gods and bring forth the Sun-goddess in all her glory.

The shamanistic character of Ame-no-uzume is emphasized by the text in saying that she danced as though possessed by a deity—this although in the story she is represented as a deity herself. In fact she is the prototype of all shamanesses, working a feat of weather magic in the ancient manner.

## VII

### WU 巫 AND HSI 覡

The intermediaries between the human and supernatural worlds, whose essential function was to ensure the productivity of the land, and particularly to bring seasonable falls of rain, was the shaman,<sup>62</sup> the Chinese *wu* 巫. The earliest texts which explain this term make it clear that the *wu* was a woman.

. . . *Wu* is *chu* 祝 ("conjure"); a woman able to serve the invisible and to bring down spirits by dancing . . .<sup>63</sup>

value of pubic hair. For instance he cites a recent charm whereby a girl who loses a needle while sewing, may find it by striking her pubic hair and combing it in a prescribed manner. Another tale of Ame-no-uzume occurs in the *Nihongi*: Amaterasu sends Ninigi-no-mikoto to rule over Japan, but on his way he is barred by a weird being named Saruta-hiko. Ame-no-uzume is sent to dispose of this creature. "So Ame no-uzume forthwith bared her breasts and, pushing down the band of her garment below her navel, confronted him with a mocking laugh." (W. G. ASTON, *Nihongi* 1.77, Supplement I, *Transactions and Proceedings of the Japan Society*, London, 1896). In this case nudity has an exorcistic purpose. The story of Uzume should be compared with that of the Ainu hero Ainurakkur, whose sister overcame the famine demon by baring her breasts. Nobuhiro MATSUMOTO, "Essai sur la mythologie japonaise," *Austro-Asiatica* 2 (1928) .131.

<sup>62</sup> For the problem of the word "shaman," see Berthold LAUFER, "Origin of the word shaman," *American Anthropologist* 19.361-371 (1917). LAUFER argues that the usual identification of Tungus *šaman* with Sanskrit *śramana* is false, and that *šaman* is a very old word in the Altaic languages, its Turkish form being *kam*, a form found in the *Kudatku bilik* and the *Codex cumanicus*. He notes that the T'ang Chinese said of the Kirgiz that "they call shamans 'kam'" (呼巫爲甘). But see the criticisms of N. D. MIRONOV and S. M. SHIROKOGOROFF, "Šramaṇa-Shaman. Etymology of the word 'shaman,'" *JNChRAS*, 55 (1924) .105-130, and S. M. SHIROKOGOROFF, *Psychometric Complex of the Tungus* (London, 1935) p. 268.

<sup>63</sup> *Shuo wen*.

... then a spirit descends into him (or her), and if a male he is called *hsi* 覡, and if a female she is called *wu*.<sup>64</sup>

The graph in the *Shuo wên* which represents *wu* is 巫. This, on the analogy of other contemporary graphs, appears to show two human figures facing some central object (possibly a pole, or in a tent-like enclosure?), and it has been indeed suggested that the picture shows a pair of shamans performing a ritual dance.<sup>65</sup> *Shuo wên*'s description of the graph, "... resembling the shape of a person with two sleeves dancing . . .," is made intelligible only by viewing the archaic forms of the graph *wu* "dance."<sup>66</sup> In Shang times the words *wu* 巫 "shaman," *wu* 舞 "dance," and *wu* 無 "luxuriant growth," now distinguished graphically and semantically, were identical graphically and phonetically. They consti-

<sup>64</sup> *Kuo yü*, Ch'ü yü 楚語 18.1a-1b. The commentary of Wei Chao 韋昭 adds, "The *wu* and the *hsi* are they who see the spirits. In the *Chou li* males are also called *wu*." I shall use the word "shamaness" to translate *wu* when it seems advantageous to draw particular attention to the femininity of the person so designated, but "shaman" for *wu* of either sex, especially if it is not clear from the context whether the person referred to is a man or a woman. In the opinion of Wolfram EBERHARD shamans in ancient China were essentially female, typically represented in the "Tai" culture. In the "Yao" culture, however, shamans were men. For a discussion of this problem of cultural differentiation and other aspects of the shamanistic cult see EBERHARD, *op. cit.*, pp. 56, 58, 311-315. Cf. Erwin ROUSSELLE, "Die Frau in Gesellschaft und Mythos der Chinesen," *Sinica* 16 (1941) 130-151. In the chapter entitled "Die Schamanin oder Seherin" (pp. 136-138), ROUSSELLE, like EBERHARD, holds shamanesses typical of the "Tai" culture (center in ancient Ch'ü) and of the Yüeh coastal culture and the tungusic culture of the north. Tungusic shamanism is well known through the studies of SHIROKOGOROFF, and southern China has been noted as strongly shamanistic by the Chinese themselves from the earliest times. I wish to acknowledge here the criticisms and suggestions of Professor Serge ELISSÉEFF, who has been kind enough to provide me with further references on shamanism in China. In a private communication dated May 20, 1949, he includes the following: "This subject is also discussed by 孫晉泰 in his article 支那の巫に就いて (民俗學) in Volume 2, No. 4, page 217, April 1930. In the article 巫字考 by 齋伯守 published in Volume II of 民俗學 No. 9 p. 531, the interpretation of the character 靈 is given. The author indicates the mistakes contained in the 'Shuo wên' as, for example, 'Wu is chu,' and states that he does not consider Lo Chên-yü's explanations of the character 巫 as correct." Unfortunately neither of these two articles is available to me.

<sup>65</sup> B. KARLGREN, *Analytic Dictionary of Chinese and Sino-Japanese*, p. 363, No. 1282.

<sup>66</sup> For studies of the graphic aspects of the word for "shaman" see L. C. HOPKINS, "The Shaman or Wu 巫, A Study in Graphic Camouflage," *The New China Review* 2.5 (Oct. 1920) 423-439, and CH'ÊN Mêng-chia, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

tuted, in short, a single word, whose connotations have since been separated out as independent words. One early form is □<sup>k</sup>, which shows a human figure with something like plumes descending from its arms: the *Shuo wên* description must refer to some form like this, or like the Lesser Seal form of *wu* 無, namely □<sup>l</sup>.<sup>67</sup> The element □<sup>m</sup> (林) is absent in some of the bronze forms of this character, and if abstracted from it, leaves □<sup>r</sup>, which is identical with the □<sup>o</sup> of the Shang oracle bones, representing a nursing mother.<sup>68</sup> Other Shang symbols equivalent to modern *wu* 巫 are □<sup>n</sup>, □<sup>p</sup>, or □<sup>q</sup>. These show hands (of a shaman?) elevating a piece of jade (the rain-compelling mineral) inside an enclosure, possibly a tent.<sup>69</sup> The Seal and modern form 巫 may well derive from this original, the hands becoming two figures, a convergence towards the dancer-type graph.

The graphic evidence, then, shows a cluster of concepts "feminine," "dance," "shaman," "fertility," and "rain-making" about the word *wu*. In the oracle bones, according to Professor CH'ÊN, this ancestral *wu* was used exclusively as a verb, "to dance for rain," and the noun "shaman" was represented by an archaic form of *wu* 戊.<sup>70</sup> Another graph to be added to the complex is 武 *wu* "martial," whose Shang form was □<sup>s</sup>, clearly related to the archaic form of 戊, which was □<sup>t</sup>. The semantic development of the former was from "ceremonial dance" to "martial dance" to "martial."<sup>71</sup> A Shang *wu* 戊 was, at least, a ritual dancer.

An examination of all the graphic and phonetic relatives of *wu* 巫 shows ancestral word-families of the phonetic shape "labial

<sup>67</sup> Now borrowed for *wu* "have not," original meaning preserved in the enlargements 蕪 and 撫.

<sup>68</sup> CH'ÊN Mêng-chia, *op. cit.*, 537.

<sup>69</sup> SUN Hai-po 孫海波, *Chia-ku wên-pien* 甲骨文編 5.2b.

<sup>70</sup> Ancient *mzu*, archaic *mug*. The other *wu*'s have ancient *mju*, archaic *mjuo*. It is interesting to note that in late historical times, the god of the productive soil, Shê-chi 社稷, was worshipped in mid-spring and mid-autumn on a day designated by the cyclical character *wu* 戊. See E. T. WILLIAMS, "Agricultural Rites in the Religion of Old China," *JNChRAS* 67.43.

<sup>71</sup> The Ta Wu 大武, a kind of Master of the Pyrrhic Dance, was a Chou official in the Department of Music (Ta Ssü Yüeh 大司樂), who gave instruction in ceremonial dancing specifically designed to "influence supernatural beings." *Chou li*, Tsung-po 宗伯 22.32b.

initial plus principal vowel in velar position," with the semantic groupings:

1. "fruitful, fertile," ( 撫 , 無 , 補 , 降 , 節 , 蕪 , 敷 , 苦 , 扶 , 步 , 拊 , 富 , 茂 , 楸 , 藪 );
2. "cherish, pacify," ( 忤 , 撫 , 懌 , 撫 , 扶 , 慕 , 怵 );
3. "woman," ( 婦 , 婦 , 媼 , 母 , 媪 , 媿 , 嫫 , 姆 );
4. "mound," ( 阜 , 培 , 塢 , 壑 , 墓 );
5. "net, membrane," ( 罟 , 罟 , 罟 , 罟 , 罟 , 罟 , 罟 , 罟 );
6. "egg, ovary, embryo," ( 浮 , 浮 , 卵 , 胎 , 胎 , 胎 , 胎 , 胎 );
7. "boat," ( 舫 , 舫 , 舫 );
8. "pot, receptacle," ( 甕 , 甕 , 甕 , 甕 , 甕 , 甕 , 甕 , 甕 );

These large word-families show a close attachment of the root-ideas "maternity/fecundity/fertility" to the ancient concept of the shaman. This conforms to Hsü Shên's definition of the shaman as a *woman*, the embodiment of the metaphysical principle *yin* 陰, and the rightful rain-maker. This association is underlined by the primitive symbolism preserved in the "Classic of Changes," under the diagram ☵, represented by the character *tui* 兌,

*Tui* is marshy-fertile (澤), a youngest daughter (少女), a shaman (巫).<sup>73</sup>

<sup>72</sup> In their archaic readings, as opposed to the ancient, this collection breaks down into two subdivisions, one with vowel final, the other with final -g. The alternation between nasal and stop initials is not surprising in view of 撫 ancient mju vs. 撫 ancient p'ju, or 武 ancient mju vs. 賦 ancient pju. The symbolologist or psychologist might investigate the meaning of these semantic associations with profit. Suffice it here to say that the possibly mysterious "net, membrane" concept seems to fit into the "fertility" idea, on the basis of 稗 and 穀, "membranous coverings of seeds of grain," via the various "ovary" words. I suggest that 浮 "to float" originally referred to the embryo in the amniotic fluid, and 浮 "many" to a multiple birth. Phonetically curious is 乳 (ancient ŋju, archaic ŋju) with the primitive 孚 which occurs in an abundance of words with labial initials having to do with "eggs" and "brood." Semantically it is consistent with its graphic relatives, since it has the meanings "nipple; suckle; breed."

<sup>73</sup> Text of the *Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series*, Supplement 10.52.

The shamaness of ancient China probably personified a fertility goddess, and the archaic graph, 𡗗, which has the known connotations of "maternity" and "productiveness" as well as "shamaness," may have represented such a divine being, shown with the full breasts of the universal mother who was incarnate in her priestess as she danced for rain. CH'ÊN Meng-chia believes that the legendary Nü Wa 女媧, sister of Fu Hsi 伏羲, was a deified shamaness, possibly to be identified with the O 娥 of the oracle bones.<sup>74</sup> This divinity, known also as the "Divine Intermediary" (*shên mei* 神媒), was simultaneously a fertility goddess (for she was prayed to by barren women), and a rain goddess.<sup>75</sup> That this was a female deity, and that she was not merely an ancient empress as in the euhemeristic interpretation of the *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu* may be known from the testimony of WANG Ch'ung 王充, who says that she was represented, presumably to worshippers, in the form of a woman.<sup>76</sup> This conversion of a shamaness into a deity is known from other times and places in China. An instance is the case of the shamaness styled Golder Flower 金華, who was enshrined in Canton after her death by drowning.<sup>77</sup>

The role *par excellence* of the ancient shamaness was that of dancer for rain. The great ceremony of the Chou dynasty, revived sporadically in later periods, was named the Yü.<sup>78</sup> The

<sup>74</sup> The archaic readings of these two names are \*nga (娥) and \*kwa (媧). The identification is phonetically uncertain. See CH'ÊN Mêng-chia, *op. cit.*, 536.

<sup>75</sup> The close relation between the fertility of human beings and of the soil was as natural in China as elsewhere. Note for example the dual role of the ancient Mulberry Grove (*sang-lin* 桑林), where T'ang 湯 prayed for rain, and which was the mating place of youths and maidens. See the ode *Sang chung* 桑中, the fourth of the *Yung* 庸 series in the "Classic of Poetry," the story of the Shamaness of the Mulberry Field in the *Tso chuan* (Duke Ch'êng 成公 tenth year), and the ritual dance performed there, mentioned by Chuang-tzû (ch. 3).

<sup>76</sup> *Lun heng* 3 (Shun-ku p'ien 順鼓篇).

<sup>77</sup> LI T'iao-yüan 李調元, *Nan-yüeh pi-chi* 南越筆記 4.65 (TSCC). The prevalence of shamans in the south is observed by LI T'iao-yüan *op. cit.*, 4.65-66, with which compare *Shih chi* 12.8b.

<sup>78</sup> Phonetically this is the same word as *yü* 雨 "rain," in modern and ancient readings alike. Apparently the ritual existed among the Shang people in some form, since the graph has been identified on the oracle bones, in the form 𡗗. See KARL-GREN, *Grammata Serica* No. 97r.



ritual code of Chou placed this ceremony specifically in the hands of the female shaman:

Female shamans shall be in charge of seasonal purification and anointing with aromatics, and in times of drought shall dance the Yü.<sup>79</sup>

In later centuries, the shamaness was gradually removed from the official hierarchy, and forced to practise her divine arts among the people, like the European witch. Yet she retained a small place in the government at least until the Sui Dynasty. The Office of the Grand Diviner (*T'ai-pu shu* 太卜署) of that period employed various kinds of augurs, and sixteen male shamans (*nan-hsi* 男覡) and eight female shamans (*nü-wu* 女巫).<sup>80</sup>

The ancient Chinese shaman was by definition a woman, but male shamans are known to have existed in every period of Chi-

<sup>79</sup> *Chou li*, "Tsung-po" 26.20a-b.

<sup>80</sup> *Sui shu* 28.2a. This office was under the jurisdiction of the *T'ai-ch'ang Ssü* 太常寺, which had existed under various titles since the Ch'in dynasty. See *Han shu* 19a.2b, *Hou Han shu* 35.1a, 2a, *Chin shu* 24.7a, *Sung shu* 39.7a-b, *Nan Ch'i shu* 16.3a-b, *Wei shu* 113.11b. During these dynasties the female shaman had varying fortunes. Under Han Kao Tsu they were extensively employed (*Shih chi* 28.7a-b), but under Wu Ti they were severely persecuted, although they had powerful connections within the ranks of the aristocracy. For a discussion of the shamans of Han and Ch'in times, and especially of their gradual transformation into professional entertainers (*ch'ang* 倡), see MORI Mikisaburō 森三樹三郎, "Shin-Kan ni okeru minkan saishi no tōitsu" 秦漢に於ける民間祭祀の統一 in *TG 東方學報* 11 (1940). 61-89. The second emperor of Later Chao, SHIH Hu 石虎 (A.D. 334-349), employed a host of female astrologers (*nü t'ai-shih* 女太史), and the foster mother of his Heir Apparent "first attained her advancement through shamanistic arts" (*Chin shu* 106.2a-b). During the early part of the Topa Wei dynasty, shamanesses were employed in various state ceremonies, but they were removed by Hsiao Wen Ti in A.D. 472 in an attempt to purify the official rites along orthodox Confucian lines (*Wei shu* 108a.2a-b, 7a.1b). The Office of the Grand Diviner was continued under the T'ang emperors, with the shamanistic personnel given as "fifteen shamanistic masters" (*wu-shih* 巫師), not distinguished as to sex (*T'ang shu* 48.3a, 4b-5a). Curiously, *Chiu T'ang shu* 44.7b does not mention shamans under this office at all. The number "fifteen" suggests that the eight shamanesses of Sui had been removed—the fifteen shamans of T'ang, plus a director, would constitute the sixteen *hsi* 覡 of Sui. Against this is the use of the word *wu*, with its usual feminine connotations plus the customary use of the logoid *shih* 師, in various titles known to apply to female shamans, e.g., *shih-p'o* 師婆 (*Chao-yeh chien-tsai* 朝野僉載 3.33 edit. of *TSCC*), or the *shih-wu* 師巫 of Kuangtung, who, although male, impersonated beautiful girls (LI T'iao-yüan *op. cit.* 1.5), and *shih-kung* 師公, used for shamanesses in the Canton area (*ibid.*, 1.13).

nese history since the Chou dynasty. These are ordinarily designated by the expression *nan wu* 男巫 "male shaman." Unless context shows definitely that the person in question is a man, the unqualified word *wu* may reasonably be translated "shamaness."

There exists, however, another word meaning "shaman," not used in the *Chou li*, and comparatively rare in Chinese literature. This is the word *hsi* 覡. Its presence in the *Ch'u yü* (see note 64 above) suggests at least the possibility that it may have been a Ch'u dialectical word. In later texts the binom *wu-hsi* 巫覡 occurs occasionally with the collective meaning "shamans." In the opinion of the writer, the Chou ruling class was particularly hostile to women in government, and regarded the ancient fertility rites as impure. This anti-female tendency was even more marked in the state of Lu, where Confucius approved of the official rain-ceremony in which men alone participated.<sup>81</sup> There was, within ancient China, a heterogeneity of culture areas, with female shamans favored in some, males in others. The "licentiousness" of the ceremonies of such a state as Chêng (doubtless preserving the ancient Shang traditions and customs) was a by-word among Confucian moralists. Confucius' state seems on the other hand to have taken the "respectable" attitude that the sexes should not mingle in the dance, and that men were the legitimate performers of the fertility rites. The general practice of the later Chou period, or at least the semi-idealized picture given of the rites of that time in such books as the *Chou li*, apparently prescribed a division of magical functions between men and women. The former generally play the role of exorcists, the latter of petitioners. This is probably related to the metaphysical belief that women, embodying the principle *yin*, were akin to the spirits, whereas men, exemplifying the element *yang*, were naturally hostile to them.<sup>82</sup>

A Chinese writer of the Ming dynasty has noted a phenomenon

<sup>81</sup> M. GRANET, in *Festivals and Songs of Ancient China*, pp. 151-152, discusses this feature.

<sup>82</sup> A similar situation has been observed in Korea. "In Korea, the male doctors attend to the duties of exorcism, while it is the work of their female colleagues to propitiate the spirits." J. L. MADDOX, *The Medicine Man, A Sociological Study of the Character and Evolution of Shamanism* 79.

which is apparent to any student of shamanistic practices in the course of Chinese history:

... the ancients, to relieve a drought, without fail employed female shamans; now we employ Buddhist and Taoist priests ... if a female shaman was not obtainable, they sometimes used *nü-kuan* 女冠 (Taoist "nuns") or Buddhist "nuns" 比丘尼, seeking *yin* by means of *yin*.<sup>83</sup>

The author of this illuminating passage goes on to say that monks are used in such rites because they are, in modern times, held in high esteem, whereas shamans (i.e., shamanesses) are little regarded. We have seen already that the exposure and burning ceremonies for making rain, where they did not devolve upon the Confucian functionary, tended in late historical times to be performed by male priests of the great religions.<sup>84</sup>

A final note on the word *hsi*: the reading *chi* for the character 覡 in some dictionaries (e.g., MATHEWS, *Chinese-English Dic-*

<sup>83</sup> T'ANG Shun-chih 唐順之, *Ching-ch'uan pai-pien* 荆川稗編 "P'ing yü yung 評雋榮" (cited in *T'u-shu chi-ch'êng*, "Li-i tien" 244 Yü-ssü pu 雋祀部).

<sup>84</sup> Such was the force of tradition in respect to the basic femininity of the shaman, that male shamans in the Far East often impersonated women, either consciously, or because a nervous and impressionable temperament, that is, an "epileptoid" character, was considered a prerequisite for successful adoption of the shamanistic profession. This behavior pattern, typical of shamans in many parts of the world, might be an unconscious imitation of the attitudes and gestures of women. The shamans of Central and Southern China, called *tuan-kung* 端公 and *nan-wu* 喃巫, are men disguised as women (Fu Ch'in-chia 傅勤家, *Chung-kuo tao-chiao shih* 中國道教史 47). The male shamans (*shih-wu* 師巫) of Kuangtung in the eighteenth century impersonated beautiful girls (Li T'iao-yüan, *op. cit.*, 1.5). DORÉ observes that the possessed boys of Amoy, with whom he was familiar, were occupied by *female spirits* (H. DORÉ, *Recherches sur les superstitions en Chine* 1.5 pp. 463 ff.). The shamans of the Ch'ing dynasty were frequently eunuchs, that is to say, artificial women (E. D. HARVEY, *The Mind of China*, pp. 127-133). I have not discovered textual examples of transvestites as shamans in ancient China, but Fu Ch'in-chia (*op. cit.*, 179-190) notes the prevalence of this linkage in ancient Korea, and it seems likely that its existence in eighteenth-century China stems from earlier practices which have been omitted or overlooked in the literature. There is a tradition that a king of Silla, in the year A. D. 576, instituted the official use of "flower boys" (*hua lang* 花郎) in place of female shamans (*San-kuo shih-chi* 三國史記, Hsin-lo pen-chi 新羅本紀 4.495-496, in *Chōsen-shi* 朝鮮史 published by the Government-General of Korea, 1932). For an example of the coupling of homosexuality with Korean shamanism in the thirteenth century, see *Kao-li shih* 高麗史 99.167a (Biography of HSÜAN Te-hsiu 玄德秀), and for a tale of a wizard "dressed in woman's clothes, as a shaman (*hsi*)," see Fu Ch'in-chia, *op. cit.*, 182.

tionary) seems to be illegitimate. It is probably based on the passage in *Hsün-tzū* ("Wang chih" 王制)<sup>85</sup> where the graph 擊, commonly read *chi*, is substituted for *hsi*. The commentary explains that 擊 is here to be read *hsi*; the deduction of an alternate reading of *chi* for 覡 is not warranted. I am unable to explain the anomalous use of the character 擊 in this passage. A possible link may be found, however, in the rare character *chi* 𠂔 \* "rain demon." *Hsi* 覡 has ancient \* $\gamma$ iek, *chi* 擊 ancient \*kiek, and *chi* 𠂔 \* ancient \*kiek. Perhaps the *hsi* was the man who personified this demon in a local ritual now lost.

## VIII

### WANG 𡗗 AND WANG 王

According to the *Tso chuan*,<sup>86</sup> mysterious personages called *wang* 𡗗 were burned in the rain-making ceremony along with the shamanesses. The word *wang*, like *hsi*, occurs sometimes as the second element of a binom with *wu* 巫, and some commentators take the whole group *wu-wang* to mean "female shamans." CH'ÊN Mêng-chia<sup>87</sup> has proposed that *wang* 𡗗 is merely an enlargement of *wang* 王 "king," and further that the "conjurer" *chu* 祝, who acts in company with the shamaness in the funeral rites described in the *Li chi* (T'an kung 檀弓) is another linguistic relative. The "phonetic" 兄 (\* $\chi$ iwang) has, he believes, lost its original value in this word.

Other words belonging to the *wang* family are: 匡 *k'uang* (\*k'iwang) "square box," "crooked (!)"; 狂 *k'uang* (\*g'iwang) "mad"; 枉 *wang* (\*iwang) "crooked," "depraved"; 誑 *kuang* (\*kiwang) "deceive." The predominant ideas are "crooked," "deceitful," "mad." *Wang* (\*wâng) 𡗗 itself is said to connote

<sup>85</sup> 偃巫跛擊之事 "... affairs of hunchbacked shamanesses and lame shamans ... ." For more about the attribution of physical deformity to shamans, see the section following, on *wang* 𡗗.

\* For this character cf. *K'ang-hsi tz'ü-tien* p. 1634 entry no. 8.

<sup>86</sup> Duke Hsi 僖公 twenty-first year.

<sup>87</sup> *Op. cit.*, 535, 565. *Wang* were also exposed for rain; cf. *Li chi*, "T'an-kung."

“emaciated,” “crippled.” This group of words suggests strongly the shamanistic character of the prehistoric Chinese king, and probably also the delirium of the great shaman when possessed by a spirit, and the deceitfulness of his oracle. Compare the kinship of *wu* 巫 “shamaness” with *wu* 誣 “false witness.” Textual evidence supports the conception of the madness of a shaman in his delirium. Thus, “he simulated madness, (acting) like a shaman.”<sup>88</sup>

These “madmen,” the *wang*, are ritualized in the *Chou li*, where the Fang-hsang-shih 方相氏, a demon impersonator, is provided with four assistants, called *k'uang-fu* 狂夫 “maniacs.”<sup>89</sup>

The graph 匡 occurs as a substitute for *wang* 尪 in *Hsün-tzū*,<sup>90</sup> in a passage exactly like that cited above from the same book with reference to *hsi*. In this case, 匡 replaces 覡. We have then “lame *wang*” as well as “lame *hsi*,” i. e., impersonators of drought and rain spirits who are physically deformed. GRANET has pointed out the same characteristic in two of the sage-kings of antiquity, both of them noted in tradition for their power over the elements.

Witches have a virtue which renders them powerful. Their power lies in the fact of their being emaciated or quite dried up. Now, it happens that two founders of royal dynasties, T'ang the Victorious and Yü the Great, are represented in history as dried-up beings. Both inaugurated their reign by sacrificing themselves for the goods of their people, the one to put an end to drought, the other to stop a flood.<sup>91</sup>

The lameness of Yü, perpetuated in “the step of Yü” 禹步, or “the shamanistic step” 巫步, should also be mentioned in this connection. The evidence, although not conclusive, suggests a ritual sacrifice of the king-shaman for his people, resulting in his lameness or emaciation, his crookedness of back as complement to his crookedness of speech.

The word *wang* 尪 survives in the dialect of Amoy in the compound *ang-i* 尪姨, signifying a female shaman.<sup>92</sup> Now the *wang*

<sup>88</sup> 佯狂爲巫. *Shih chi* 92.6b, and a similar passage in *Han shu* 45.2b. “Simulate” is *yang*, written 陽, 詳, or 佯.

<sup>89</sup> *Chou li* 7.5a (Hsia kuan 夏官). E. T. C. WERNER in “The Origin of the Chinese Priesthood,” *JNChRAS* 59, p. 192, makes the assertion that the Fang-hsiang-shih himself was “originally, as well as in later times” known as a *k'uang-fu*.

<sup>90</sup> “Chêng lun” 正論 12.5b.

<sup>91</sup> *Chinese Civilization*, p. 191.

<sup>92</sup> J. J. M. De GROOT, *The Religious System of China*, p. 1333.

尪 was the *wang* 王—the king in his ceremonial role as chief of the shamans. In the present state of our knowledge we do not know if, at the time when the two words were not yet completely differentiated, the *wang* was male or female. The possibility of the latter having been the case is suggested by (1) the possibility of a semantic survival in Amoy, (2) the fact that female shamanism was characteristic of this remote age, (3) the erstwhile high political status of prehistoric shamanesses, as indicated by traditions of Shang “ministers” called “The Shaman (ess) so-and-so” (see footnote 10 above), and (4) commentators’ definitions of the expression *wu-wang* as “female shamans.” Against this is the strength of the male tradition in Chinese kingship. Possibly, at the earliest period for which we can fruitfully contrive hypotheses, the high-shaman was a man while his subordinates were women. Moreover it seems reasonable that, at some stage, the *wang* 尪 was, if not the king himself, a substitute for the king in the rites of exposure and burning—crooked like the legendary Yü, a scapegoat in kingly guise.

## IX

### PO 魃 OR PO 妣

It has been stated that the ancient shamaness impersonated a drought spirit in the rain ceremony. This spirit, called *han-po* 旱魃, is known from the *Shih ching*.<sup>93</sup> No source as early as this, however, *describes* the spirit, but a text of the third century A. D. reveals, and later texts confirm the opinion, that it had eyes on top of its head. *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan*, citing the lost work of WEI Chao 韋昭 (A. D. 204-273), *Mao-shih ta-wên* 毛詩答問, says, “The eyes of the drought demon are on the top of its head.”<sup>94</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Poem Yün han 雲漢. LEGGE translates the line in question, “The demon of drought exercises his oppression, as if scattering flames and fire.”

<sup>94</sup> *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 364.5b. The citation is garbled. The author's name is given as 韋曜, and the title of his book as 毛詩問 (without the 答). Moreover, *po* appears as 鬼. The *Tz'ü t'ung* makes the proper emendations but unnecessarily substitutes *t'ou* 頭 for *ting* 頂. WEI Chao's book is reconstructed in the *Yü-han-shan-fang chi-i-shu* 15.3a, with the title *Mao-shih ta-tsa-wên* 毛詩答雜問 and gives the passage

The same monster, in somewhat different guise, less monstrous in fact, appears in the *Shan-hai ching* 山海經.<sup>95</sup> The latter relates that on a certain mountain

There is a person clad in blue-green garments called Po, daughter of the Yellow God.<sup>96</sup> Ch'ih-yu 蚩尤 took up arms and attacked the Yellow God. The Yellow God then commanded Ying-lung 應龍 to attack him in the wilderness of Chi-chou 冀州. Ying-lung impounded the waters, and Ch'ih-yu besought the Earl of the Winds 風伯 and the Master of Rain 雨師 to let loose a great wind and rain. The Yellow God then sent down a sky-woman 天女 called Po, and the rain stopped, whereupon he killed Ch'ih-yu. Po was not able to ascend again, and where she stayed it did not rain.<sup>97</sup>

In this myth the drought-demon is female and a benevolent character. She is a spirit with power over the rain.<sup>98</sup>

as "The *po*-demon is man-shaped; its eyes are on top of its head" 魃鬼人形眼在頂上. This is based on a version in OU-YANG Hsün 歐陽詢, *I-wên lei-chü* 藝文類聚 100.

<sup>95</sup> Ta-huang pei ching 大荒北經 17.2b-3a (edit. of *Tzŭ-shu pai-chia*).

<sup>96</sup> Or, "The Yellow God's Nü-po."

<sup>97</sup> For a critical examination of this and related texts see B. KARLGREN, "Legends and cults in ancient China," *BMFEA* 18(1946).199-365. KARLGREN translates *ying-lung* as "Winged Dragon," but commentaries do not say that *ying* means "winged," only that Ying-lung is a dragon with wings. A literal translation: "Responding Dragon." LIU Ming-hsü 劉銘恕 has made the deity Po a clear solar goddess. This attractive thesis requires reading the *Shan-hai ching* passage as *t'ien nü jih po* 天女日魃 instead of the conventional *t'ien nü yüeh po* 曰, so that the name of the goddess becomes Jih-po 日魃. I do not know that any other scholar has suggested this emendation, which unhappily lacks the support of the appearance of the name *jih-po* in any other text. Nonetheless a drought-creating deity is most naturally the sun, and the ceremony *p'u* 暴 (□<sup>u</sup>), graphically an offering (for practical or religious purposes) to that star, certainly was a ritual of exposure to its consuming rays. See LIU Ming-hsü, "Wu-liang tz'ü hou-shih-shih so-chien Huang-ti Ch'ih-yu chan-t'u k'ao 武梁祠後石室所見黃帝蚩尤戰圖考," *Bulletin of Chinese Studies* 2(1942).341-365, especially page 352. On p. 354 the author identifies "Jih-po" with the sky goddess Hsüan Nü 玄女, elsewhere an emissary of Heaven to the Yellow God. See CHANG Shou-chieh 張守節, *Shih-chi cheng-i* 史記正義 1.3a (edit. of *Ssü-pu pei-yao*), citing *Lung-yü ho t'u* 龍魚河圖.

<sup>98</sup> M. GRANET pairs Nü-po with a male counterpart, Kêng-fu 耕父 (GRANET translates "the Plowman"). This deity is mentioned in the *Shan-hai ching* and is elsewhere described as a drought demon (see *Hou Han shu* 15.4b, comm.). From his function, Kêng-fu is a male god of drought; from his name, also a fertility god. There is also a bird in the *Shan-hai ching* called *ch'ing-kêng* 青耕, which has the power to ward off the plague. The recurrence of the element *kêng* is interesting. Birds in China, as elsewhere, have power over rainfall (see J. G. FRAZER, *The Magic Art and the Evolu-*

Other tales of the goddess Po give her other properties. *Shên-i ching* 神異經 says,

In the southern regions there is a person about two or three feet long, bare of body, with eyes on top of its head (祖身而目在頂上). Its running is like the wind, and it is named Po. In the country where it appears there is a great drought, and there is red (naked) earth 赤土 for a thousand *li*. Its alternate name is Ko 格.<sup>99</sup> If he who encounters it captures it and throws it into a cesspool it will die, and the calamity of drought will abate.<sup>100</sup>

The noteworthy addition here is the characterization of the deity as nude. Conceivably this reflects the appearance of the shamanistic dancer who impersonated her in ancient times.

*tion of Kings (The Golden Bough)*, pp. 261, 287 ff. (3rd ed. London, 1911), and Mark W. HARRINGTON, "Weather Making, ancient and modern," *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution* (1894) 249-270, for many examples of rain-making and rain-predicting by birds). The *yü* 鵲 (sometimes identified with the kingfisher, but nowadays meaning "snipe") is a well-known Chinese rain-predicting bird; it is so described in the *Shuo wên*. As for *ch'ing-kêng*, *Shan-hai ching* says "it is shaped like a magpie, with a blue-green (*ch'ing*) body, a white beak, white eyes and a white tail." Some water bird is suggested, but the magpie shape seems to rule out the kingfisher. In China, drought spirits are barely distinguishable from plague spirits (see CH'EN Méng-chia, *op. cit.*, 568, where he treats the demon personified by the Fang-hsiang-shih as bi-functional, drought-demon and plague-demon, originally identical).

<sup>99</sup> \*kək (Arch. \*klāk) or \*γək (Arch. \*g'lāk); cf. 垆 \*γək (Arch. \*g'lāk) "water drying off land," and compare the data on relatives of *lu* 露 "expose" given below.

<sup>100</sup> I translate the version cited in CH'EN Ch'í 錢琦, *Tao-yü tsa-chi* 禱雨雜紀 (TSCC) written in the sixteenth century. Other editions of the text of *Shên-i ching* (attributed to Tung-fang Shuo 東方朔 of the Han dynasty) vary considerably from the version given here. That of *Tzū-shu pai-chia* gives as another name of the drought spirit the graph ○ \* (pronunciation unknown; this seems to be the only textual occurrence). In this edition the word "Po" does not appear as part of the basic text, but in the double-column commentary, thus: "Popularly it is called Han-po." The whole passage is absent from the edition of *Han Wei t'sung shu*, which reproduces the version constructed by CH'ENG Jung 程榮 (Ming dyn.). The date of the attribution of the described characteristics to a being called Po is therefore impossible to determine. Nudity is not unknown as an attribute of deity in China. Cf. *Yü-ti ch'i-shêng* 128.7a, relative to Mt. Fu 福山: "The *Chün-kuo chih* 郡國志 says that on its summit there is a divine being, bare of body, with dishevelled hair. If a man sees it he will inevitably have good fortune. Hence its (i. e., the mountain's) name." See also W. EBERHARD on the naked god Kun, in *op. cit.*, 370, and the same author on the nude goddess of Kuangsi, called Yeh-p'o 野婆, in "Kultur und Siedlung der Randvölker Chinas," *TP*, Supplement to vol. 36 (1942) 357.

\* For this character cf. *K'ang-hsi tzu-tien* p. 1708, third entry.



Henri MASPERO has observed the stubbornness with which European Sinologues persist in writing of this spirit as masculine, apparently following the authority of LEGGE in his translation of the *Shih ching*.<sup>101</sup> Graphic evidence also points to the feminine nature of Po. A common alternate of *po* 魅 is *po* 妿.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore there is little reason to doubt that the word *nü* 女 prefixed to the name *po* should be taken with its full semantic value. The compound *nü-po* occurs with fair frequency, although it is not as common as *han-po*.<sup>103</sup> *Nü-po* appears also with the graphs 女 妿. The passage in which the latter forms appear is interesting in adding another physical peculiarity to those already noted:

*Nü Po* is bald and hairless. In the places where she dwells it does not rain.<sup>104</sup>

Doubtless the baldness symbolizes the lack of vegetation in drought-burned fields (cf. *fa* 髮 "hair," with phonetic 友).

The dynastic annals note from time to time the actual appearance, and occasionally the capture, of a drought spirit. Thus a *nü-po* was caught at Ch'ang-an in A. D. 680. Its length was one foot two inches, and "in this year it did not rain during the autumn nor until the first month of the following year."<sup>105</sup> Similarly the appearance of a *po* is registered in the fourteenth century: in A. D. 1336 a woman bore a son with a "dog's head," which died at birth. It was believed to be a *han-po*. Another was

<sup>101</sup> H. MASPERO, "Légendes Mythologiques dans le *Chou King*," *JA* 204, p. 57, note 2.

<sup>102</sup> Actually 魅 is the form of the *Shih ching*, and of the various editions of the *Shan-hai ching*. MASPERO (*loc. cit.*) notes, however, the remark of Ho I-hsing 郝懿行 in his *Shan-hai ching chien shu* 山海經箋疏 17.6a to the effect that according to Kuo P'u's commentary it is likely that the primitive text had 女 妿 and the commentary 魅. Moreover the citation in *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* 79.2b has 女 妿 uniformly for the 魅 of the standard editions of *Shan-hai ching*.

<sup>103</sup> Note the compound *nü-po* in the *Chu-shu chi-nien* 竹書紀年 (Pt. 1, Ch. 1), in a passage translated by LEGGE; "By means of the Heavenly Lady Pā, he stopped the extraordinary rains caused by the enemy." LEGGE notes that this may be an interpolation of the sixth century by the commentator SHÊN Yüeh 沈約.

<sup>104</sup> Ts'AO Hsien 曹憲, *Wên-tzŭ chih-kuei* 文字指歸 cited in *Kuang yü-n* 廣韻, rhyme 末, under 女 妿. Ts'AO Hsien wrote during the Sui dynasty. *Kuang yü-n*'s definition of *po* 妿 is "spirit woman" (鬼婦).

<sup>105</sup> *T'ang shu* 36.9a.

seen in A. D. 1354, during a great drought.<sup>106</sup> In the first of these notices we see a common feature of the folklore of historic times—the association of abnormal births with the drought spirit. This notion is generalized by CHU Yü 朱彥, writing in the early twelfth century:

The tradition is that if a woman bears something in a demon's shape and is unable to seize and kill it, it will fly away, but will return by night, go to her breast and cause the mother much suffering. This is popularly called a *han-po*.<sup>107</sup>

This statement immediately calls to mind the story of the exposure of the woman in Northern Yen (see above, p. 135) who had borne a drought demon. The text just quoted goes on to distinguish between male and female *po*, but the term *êrh-po* 兒魃 (as distinguished from *nü-po*) is unique here. It may be a late folkloristic development to account for the obvious masculinity of some monstrous births.

But the drought spirit has also, in relatively recent times, been materialized as a corpse. Thus a text of the eighteenth century:

The *han-po* is in fact always a cadaver. If it is exhumed and burned, this will often cause it to rain.<sup>108</sup>

The burning of the shamaness who impersonated the deity in archaic times is relevant to this concept. Is the latter a vestige of the ritual in popular legend?

The family of words written with the phonetic 𠂔 has the root meaning of “root; uproot; pull out,” and conversely of “cover; protection.” It also includes a number of words with ceremonial connotations, especially exorcistic:

|   |           |                                                                  |
|---|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 𠂔 | po/*b'uât | “expel”                                                          |
| 𠂔 | “         | “trample; foot”                                                  |
| 𠂔 | “         | “furrow” (also written 𠂔,<br>alternate pronunciation fa/*b'iwæt) |
| 𠂔 | po/*puât  | “body hairs”                                                     |
| 𠂔 | “         | “grass roots”                                                    |

<sup>106</sup> Both from *Yüan shih* 元史 51.7b.

<sup>107</sup> CHU Yü, *K'o t'an* 可談 8a (in *Pai-ch'uan hsüeh-hai* 百川學海).

<sup>108</sup> CHI Yün 紀昀, *Yüeh-wei-ts'ao-t'ang pi-chi* 閱微草堂筆記 7.1b.

|   |             |                                  |
|---|-------------|----------------------------------|
| 拔 | pa/*b'wat   | “pull out,” or                   |
|   | pei/*b'uâi  | “trees thinned out”              |
| 髮 | fa/*p̥iɰwət | “hair”                           |
| 輶 | po/*b'uât   | “road sacrifice” <sup>109</sup>  |
| 袂 | fa/*b'ïwət  | “shield”                         |
| 紱 | fu/*p̥iɰət  | “silken waist-band for seal”     |
| 韍 | fu/*p̥iɰət  | “knee cover” <sup>110</sup>      |
| 黻 | fu/*p̥iɰət  | “embroidered symbols on robe”    |
| 帔 | fu/*p̥iɰət  | “ceremonial wand” <sup>111</sup> |
| 祓 | fu/*p̥iɰət  | “exorcise”                       |

The last of these words is employed in the *Chou li* in describing the exorcistic activities of the female shamans.<sup>112</sup> It was, in short, a word used to describe the banishing of the spirit of drought and infertility, personalized in the goddess Po 敔.<sup>113</sup>

To the list of related words already given, the following may be added:

|     |            |                       |
|-----|------------|-----------------------|
| * 𡵓 | po/*b'uât  | “trample grass”       |
| 撥   | “          | “uproot”              |
| 伐   | fa/*b'ïwət | “strike; plow furrow” |

<sup>109</sup> See Bruno SCHINDLER, “On the Travel, Wayside and Wind Offerings in Ancient China,” *AM* 1 (1924). 651-3. SCHINDLER regards the *po* 輶 as essentially a dog sacrifice, and does not make much of its connection with *po* 友 and *fu* 祓. Dogs or no dogs, the *po* 輶 sacrifice was certainly exorcistic, though not directly connected with droughts.

<sup>110</sup> The specific ceremonial purpose of some of these garments in ancient times is not clear. That they *did* in fact have ritual significance is certain. See *Li chi*.

<sup>111</sup> So KARLGREN. For the *fu* dance 帔舞, see *Chou li* 3.36b-37a (*Ssü-pu ts'ung-k'an*) under *wu-shih* 舞師 “Dance Master,” and *ibid.* 6.7b under *yüeh-shih* 樂師 “Music Master.” This dance was performed with feathers, and was connected with the worship of the fertility god, *Shê chi* 社稷. The dance particularly connected with rain-making, in the systematization of the *Chou li*, was the *huang* dance 皇舞, a part of the *Yü* 雩 ceremony.

<sup>112</sup> See note 80 for reference. “Purification” there is the word I translate “exorcise” here.

<sup>113</sup> The conversion of a rite into a deity is a phenomenon not unknown in the history of religions, see for instance Gilbert MURRAY, *Five Stages of Greek Religion*, p. 28, and *passim* (London: The Thinker's Library, 1943). The applicability of this theory here is not certain.

\*For this character cf. *K'ang-hsi tzü-tien* p. 867 entry no. 25.

|   |             |                         |
|---|-------------|-------------------------|
| 罰 | “           | “punish”                |
| 𠂔 | po/*puât    | “trampling feet”        |
| 撥 | “           | “bend”                  |
| 蓆 | “           | “straw raincoat”        |
| 發 | fa/*p̥iɰət  | “shoot; throw out”      |
| 弗 | fu/*p̥iɰət  | “remove” <sup>114</sup> |
| 剗 | fu/*p̥iɰət  | “chop”                  |
| 拂 | “           | “brush off”             |
| 廢 | fei/*p̥iɰəi | “remove”                |
| 佛 | fu/*b̥iɰət  | “resist”                |
| 拂 | “           | “oppose”                |
| 曝 | fei/*p̥jwəi | “expose to sun” (曝也!)   |

The etymon appears to be something like \*BWAD, with a palatalized variant (contrast 𠂔 \*b'uât with 蓆 \*p̥iɰət). The meanings may have been: non-palatalized—“to uproot”; palatalized—“to ward off,” both convergent in the meaning “exorcise.” Possibly related is Tibetan *byad* “1. symmetry, beauty; 2. enemy; wicked demon; imprecation, malediction.”<sup>115</sup> The vocalization is difficult. But (1) the velar vowel is almost universal after labial initials in ancient Chinese; it is an extension of the initial, peculiar to that language; (2) a palatalized form of the root word existed in archaic Chinese, as indicated above; (3) analogous Chinese-Tibetan correspondences have already been proposed. Thus Chinese 八 \*p̥wat “eight” with Tibetan *brgyad* “eight.”<sup>116</sup>

As for the form 𠂔, the *Shuo wên* does not list the meaning “name of a drought deity” in its definition of this word. It gives only the meaning “beauty of a woman.” Moreover the *Chi yün* 集韻<sup>117</sup> says that 𠂔 𠂔 is a word for “woman” among the

<sup>114</sup> 弗 is used in the sense of “exorcise” in *Shih ching* (ode Shêng min 生民) in reference to the goddess Chiang Yüan 姜嫄, ancestress of the Chou royal clan, who sacrificed “in order to exorcise her barrenness” 以弗無子 (see commentary of CHENG Hsüan 鄭玄).

<sup>115</sup> H. A. JÄSCHKE, *A Tibetan English Dictionary* (London, 1934).

<sup>116</sup> See Walter SIMON, “Tibetisch-chinesische Wortgleichungen,” *MSOS* 32 (1929). 1732, 213. It has been otherwise proposed that Chinese 割 \*kât is the true cognate of Tibetan *brgyad*. This does not rule out the Chinese -a- Tibetan -ya- correspondence either.

Ch'iang 羌 people. Possibly we have a pair of homonyms here: *po* 娥 (in *nü-po*) as an alternate of 魑, to emphasize the feminine nature of the deity, and *po* 婁, a loan-word from a western dialect given lexical status by the *Shuo wên*. Or perhaps the goddess of drought was of western origin, called in her homeland simply "The Woman," with *nü* prefixed by the Chinese by way of explanation. To the writer, however, the best explanation is to regard the word as common to archaic Chinese and Tibetan, from a proto-Sino-Tibetan original, with one of its meanings "woman," or "female beauty," reintroduced into Chinese as a loan-word. The meanings of Tibetan *byad* (beauty; demon; imprecation) correspond nicely to Chinese 婁, 魑, and 祓. The chart on the following page indicates the possible lines of development.

## X

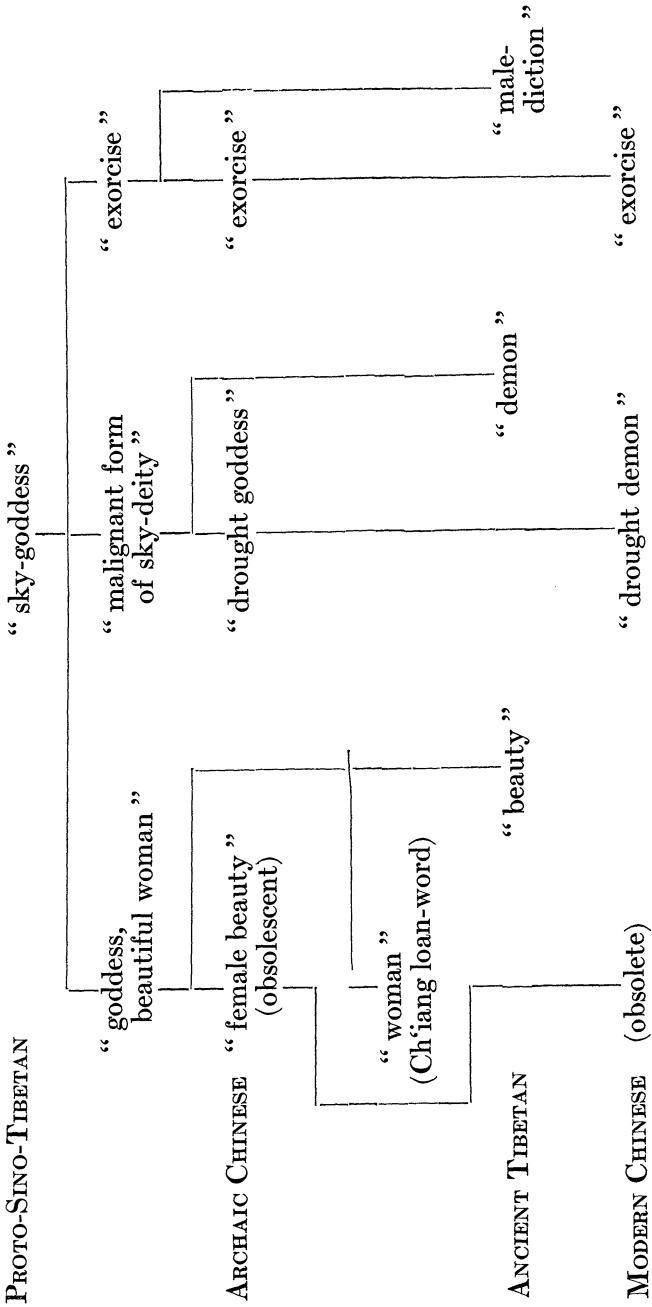
## P'U 暴, LU 露 AND HSIANG 襄

The character 暴, standardized by antique usage in the meaning "to expose (a person, esp. in a rain-making rite)," has the usual reading *pao*/\*b'âu (Archaic \*b'og), in which case it means "fierce, violent." In the former meaning, however, the word is *p'u*/\*b'uk. The seal character of *Shuo wên* is 𠂔<sup>117</sup>, explained in TUAN Yü-ts'ai's commentary as a pair of hands holding rice up to the rising sun to dry it.<sup>118</sup> The primary meaning of the word was "expose to the sun," surviving in the enlargement *p'u* 曝. The "ablaut" form *pao* "fierce" was probably derivative as far as this graph was concerned. The meaning "to expose (someone) to the sun," as in a rain ceremony, is at least as old as the Chou dynasty, as we have seen from the textual occurrences of the expression *p'u-wu* 暴巫. It is even possible that the meaning "violent" traditionally assigned to 暴 in some texts is incorrect. A possible emendation along these lines is suggested by a passage

<sup>117</sup> *Chi yün*, Sung text in *Wu yün* 五韻, rhyme 末, under 撥.

<sup>118</sup> *Tuan-chu Shuo-wên chieh-tzû* 段注說文解字 7a.11b.

CHART INDICATING THE LINES OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE DESIGNATIONS  
FOR THE GODDESS OF DROUGHT



in Mencius: 自暴者不可與有言也.<sup>119</sup> LEGGE translates this as “With those who do violence to themselves it is impossible to speak.” The alternative interpretation, reading *p’u* for *pao* (and the phrase *tzū p’u* “to expose oneself” is common enough), is “It is not possible to have speech with those who expose themselves,” that is, to speak with shamanistic rain-makers (a jab at the decaying ancient religion or at fanatics). This thesis, though suggestive, is not now possible to prove.

Etymological relatives of *pao/p’u* are not common. Aside from enlargements of 暴, such as 曝, 瀑, and 爆, the word *p’ao/\*b’âu* (Arch. \*b’ôg) 炮 “roast; fierce” goes with the linguistic form *pao*, and *po/\*pâk* (Arch. \*pŭk) 剥 “strip, lay bare” with the form *pu*. Of particular interest is *p’o/\*p’âk* (Arch. \*p’ŭk) 朴 “bark of a tree,” that is, “what is stripped off,” from *pu/\*puk* (Arch. \*puk) 卜 “diviner.”<sup>120</sup> Thus the connection between stripping/exposure and magical activities seems borne out by the philological evidence.<sup>121</sup>

Another word commonly used, especially in later texts, to mean “expose” is *lu* 露. This probably meant “expose to the dew” in contrast to “expose to the sun,” which was *p’u*. With this should be compared *lo/\*luâ* (Arch. glwâr) “naked” 裸.

|   |                       |                             |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 露 | <i>lu/*luo/*glâg</i>  | “to expose”                 |
| 落 | <i>lo/*lâk/*glâk</i>  | “to shed leaves”            |
| 鞞 | “                     | “rawhide, skin”             |
| 烙 | “                     | “burn”                      |
| 垆 | <i>ho/*γek/*g’lâk</i> | “water drying up”           |
| 骼 | <i>ko/*këk/*klâk</i>  | “bare bones” <sup>122</sup> |

<sup>119</sup> Li lou 離婁 a.

<sup>120</sup> 朴 alternates with 暴, as in 辟暴 “open up”; “split open and expose.” Alternate form 棼朴. See *Tz’ü t’ung* 2313. Also note *po* 襍, usually “(red) collar,” in 表襍, identical with 表暴 and 標白 “to set forth.” See *Tz’ü t’ung* 2295.

<sup>121</sup> Non-Chinese cognates are probably Siamese *bpauk*<sup>4</sup> (McFARLAND; pò:g in the phonemic transcription of Dr. Mary HAAS) “to pare, peel, flay; stripped off,” and perhaps Tibetan *pags-pa* “skin, hide, bark” (JÄSCHKE).

<sup>122</sup> See the *Shih wên* 釋文 commentary on the *Li chi*, Yüeh ling 月令.

*Lo* 烙 is particularly interesting as part of the term *p'ao-lo* 炮烙, described in *Shih chi* 3 as a "punishment" employed by Chou Hsin. Possibly the Chou conquerers have so interpreted a religious rite analogous to fire-walking in the Western world. The punishment is elsewhere (*Lieh nü chuan* 列女傳) said to consist in having the victim tread a metal pole over a fire. *Lu* 路, as the basic form of 露, goes with this set, especially in view of *lu-tan* 路亶 "naked."<sup>123</sup> Similarly *lo* 落 "stripped" appears in *lo-tan* 落亶 (or 落單), equivalent to modern *lu-t'an* 露袒.<sup>124</sup> A series of binoms indicates an archaic word \*B<sup>u</sup>GLAK:

|     |           |                           |
|-----|-----------|---------------------------|
| 暴露  | (Archaic) | *b'uk-glâg <sup>125</sup> |
| 剝落  | "         | *pük-glâk                 |
| 暴樂  | "         | *b'uk-glâk (or b'og-glâk) |
| (爆爍 | "         | " " " " )                 |
| 炮格  | "         | *b'ôg-klăk                |
| 炮烙  | "         | *b'ôg-glâk <sup>126</sup> |

The first three correspond to modern *p'u* 暴 "expose," the last two to modern *pao* 暴 "do violence to (by fire)."

A possible connection between the concepts of "stripping" and "fertility" may be found in the word *hsiang*/\**sjang* (Arch. \**snjang*) 襄. *Shuo wên* explains, "(In) the Han law, to plow with the clothes removed is called *hsiang*." Something more than the common near or complete nudity of a peasant at work seems to be involved.<sup>127</sup> Graphs embodying the primitive 襄 are quite numerous, and carry such meanings as "strip" and "fertile" as will be seen below. But of particular interest is 禳 *jang*/\**ńjang* (Arch. \**ńjang*), explained by *Shuo wên* as a ceremony to expel noxious influences, and appearing in *Chou li* with that meaning.<sup>128</sup> The word also appears conjoined with *fu* 祓 as *fu-jang* (\**p'juet-*

<sup>123</sup> *Hsün-tzũ*, I-ping p'ien 議兵篇 10.2b (edit. of *Ssü-pu ts'ung-k'an*).

<sup>124</sup> LIU Hsiang 劉向, *Hsin hsü* 新序 3.36 (TSCC).

<sup>125</sup> See the story of Ch'i Ching Kung and Yen-tzũ and the letter of YING Ch'ü above; also the tale of Fo-t'u-têng.

<sup>126</sup> See *Tz'ũ t'ung* 23.21, 23.61.

<sup>127</sup> I am indebted for this suggestion to Prof. P. A. BOODBERG.

<sup>128</sup> "T'ien kuan" 2.30b, under Nü chu 女祝.



ńziang) in *Tso chuan* where it describes a ceremony to avert the calamity of fire.<sup>129</sup> The rite is specifically connected with the *she* 社, altar to the earth-deity, suggesting that this kind of exorcism was traditionally for the fertility of the land.

Following are members of the family (readings, as usually, follow KARLGREN):

|   |              |                                |
|---|--------------|--------------------------------|
| 饗 | shang/*síang | “bring food to field-workers”  |
| 壤 | jang/*ńziang | “cultivated soil; mound; rich” |
| 攘 | “ “          | “pull away; pull up sleeves”   |
| 穰 | “ “          | “heavy with dew”               |
| 禳 | “ “          | “exorcistic rite”              |
| 穰 | “ “          | “rich growth of grain”         |
| 讓 | “ “          | “yield; give way”              |

The strip/fertile/exorcism complex, then, is repeated in this phonetically very uniform series.<sup>130</sup>

## XI

### T'AN 袒

The graphic series using the phonetic 旦 includes a few words which, taken together, indicate a root meaning of “to remove a covering.”

|   |      |                                        |
|---|------|----------------------------------------|
| 袒 | t'an | “to be bare”                           |
| 坦 | t'an | “to lay bare (MATHEWS); opened up”     |
| 袒 | tan  | “to brush off; to dust” <sup>131</sup> |

A branch of this word-family has the final stop instead of nasal.

<sup>129</sup> Chao Kung 昭公 eighteenth year. LEGGE translates the passage 大爲社祓禳於四方 thus: “celebrated a great sacrifice at the altar of the land, and ordered exorcisms and deprecatory sacrifices throughout the state.” Better would be “made Earth-altars on a large scale and performed exorcistic rites to the four directions.”

<sup>130</sup> Compare 灋 with 露 in the latter's meaning of “dew,” as against 襄 and 攘 with 露 in the latter's meaning “expose (to dew).”

<sup>131</sup> There is a curious analogy between this series and the meanings of *ch'ih* 赤 “red, naked.” Note here *tan* (\*tân) 丹 “red,” and *tan* (\*tân) 旦 “sunrise” (emphasis on the redness of dawn?).

Thus *ta*/\*tât 怛 “grieved.” There is not much to be done with this, but *ta*/\*tât 姪 is more suggestive.<sup>132</sup>

GRANET, that imaginative sociologist, writing of the “orgies” of Chou Hsin, which he believes to have been the midwinter ceremonies of the Shang court to assure the reascendancy of the *yang* principle, says:

Therefore their winter festivals ended with an orgy in which men and women, formed into opposing groups, struggled together and tore off each other's garments. . . . In the same way, in the royal festival, men and women pursued each other, quite naked. Singing a song which treated of the death of the sun, they then danced round dances.<sup>133</sup>

Without saying yea or nay to the assumption that this was the expression of a solar cult, I wish to add my support to GRANET's belief that the great festival, interpreted by the Chou moralists as merely a secular display of licentiousness, was in fact a religious ceremony. But in addition I wish to emphasize that Chou Hsin is usually said to have instituted these orgies at the instigation of the beloved lady Ta Chi 姬己.<sup>134</sup> This was the same lady who is supposed to have taken special pleasure in the fire ceremony called *p'ao-lo*. While it is easy to see in the nudity of the celebrants an ancient custom in fertility rites, it requires a more extravagant leap of the fancy to see in Ta Chi a priestess of the cult. The commentaries say that Chi was the family name of the princes of Su 蘇 from whom she was descended, and that she

<sup>132</sup> It may be that these words provide a link with another series with a velar vowel: *t'o* (\*t'uât) 脫 “to peel off, remove (clothes)”; *t'uei* (\*t'uái) 蛻 “exuviae of insects,” etc.); *t'o* (\*t'uât) 掇 “take away” (also read *shuei* (\*šjwǎi) “to wipe off,” cf. *tan* 担 above); *shuei* (\*šjwǎi) 帨 “kerchief” (i. e., “wiper”). It should be noted that the character 襜 often interchanges with 袒. In the meaning of “to be bared” it is read *tan* (\*d'ân). But it appears frequently, especially in the *Li chi*, in the sense of “plain, undecorated (of clothes),” from “bare, unadorned,” in which case it should be read *chan* (\*tjǎn). Possibly related are *tan* (\*tân) 單 “single; simple” and *tan* (\*tân) 禪 “unlined garment.” *Tan i* 檀衣 “unadorned clothes” are regularly prescribed for noble women of certain ranks at important ceremonies. The phonetic series with 亶 is probably closely related to both 旦 and 單. We might add *t'an* (\*d'ân) 壇 “altar, especially for burnt offerings” in view of the religious connotations of the whole complex. *Tan* (\*tân) 亶 must be included in view of *lu tan* 路亶. See above, p. 172.

<sup>133</sup> *Chinese Civilization*, p. 201.

<sup>134</sup> See *Shih chi* 3.4b. The name is also written 姬姬.

was styled (*tzu*) Ta. Could her name have been in fact a descriptive title, "The Nude (Lady) of the Chi clan?"

#### APPENDIX

##### RITUAL NUDITY IN NON-SINITIC CULTURES

The legend of Ishtar and Tammuz furnishes a Western parallel to the Chinese ritual of exposing a shamaness to obtain power over the spirit of drought. The Mesopotamian goddess sought to coerce Allatu, goddess of the nether world, whose minister was the demon of plague and whose scribe was "The Lady of the Desert," into releasing her lover. To effect this end she was required to abandon successively parts of her clothing, until she reached her objective quite nude.<sup>1</sup> Ritual exposure, whether it illustrates a pre-existent myth, or whether it is justified by the creation of a pertinent myth, or whether its existence in a cult has no traceable links in mythology, purports to give power over the mysterious forces of the universe. In this appendix, I have collected, with as little comment as possible, a number of instances illustrating the exposure of human beings in a ritualistic way outside of China, emphasizing those which aim at controlling the weather and the fertility of the soil. The list could be easily added to, and doubtless other examples will occur to the reader.

Ritual exposure in weather magic, including rain-making, usually takes the form of complete or partial nudity.<sup>2</sup> In various forms, and linked with various other ceremonial procedures, ritual nudity is very widespread in Europe, Africa and Asia. In the ancient Roman culture sphere, a naked woman (especially when menstruating, but not necessarily) had the power to quell storms.<sup>3</sup> Maimonides, using Oriental sources partly based on such works as the Greek *Geoponica*, tells that four women lying on their backs with raised legs, exposing themselves to the sky, have the power to stop a hailstorm.<sup>4</sup> A similar custom survives in modern Serbia, where an old woman can exorcise the storm-spirits by baring her buttocks to the clouds.<sup>5</sup> In Gaul a maiden stood naked in a river and was whipped with branches as a rain-charm.<sup>6</sup> For Germany in the eleventh century, Bishop Burchard of Worms reports that

<sup>1</sup> Marian EDWARDES and Lewis SPENCE, *A Dictionary of Non-classical Mythology* 8, p. 92 (Everyman's Library, 3rd edit.).

<sup>2</sup> For a study of weather-magic of all kinds see H. BERKUSKY, "Regenzauber," *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien* 43 (1913) .273-310.

<sup>3</sup> C. Plini Secundi, *Naturalis Historiae* 28.23.

<sup>4</sup> M. FRIEDLANDER, *The Guide of the Perplexed of Maimonides* 3 (London, 1885), 171 (Chapter 37).

<sup>5</sup> F. S. KRAUSS, "Erotik und Skatologie im Zauberbann und Bannspruch," *Anthropophyteia* 4 (1907) .170.

<sup>6</sup> J. A. MACCULLOCH, "Branches and Twigs," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* 2, p. 833.

a young girl was undressed, henbane tied to her foot, and splashed with water, to bring a fall of rain.<sup>7</sup> In such cases devices of sympathetic magic and the like have attached themselves to the nudity custom. In Rumania, Serbia, Croatia, Bulgaria and Greece there is the custom of stripping a girl (known as the *papaluga* in Rumania) and covering her with leaves and flowers as part of a rain-making ceremony.<sup>8</sup> Also in Transylvania, to bring an end to a drought, a group of nude girls drag a harrow into the fields.<sup>9</sup> In Ruthenia, at the end of the eighteenth century, naked women were thrown into the water to bring rain after a long drought.<sup>10</sup> In this general connection, it is interesting that in Germany it is believed that if a storm-creating witch can be detected by a counter-charm, she will be seen completely nude, and will fall from the clouds in this condition.<sup>11</sup> In Wallachia, nude women pour water on the ground by night to end a drought.<sup>12</sup> Among the Bantu on the banks of the Limpopo, the village women remove their clothes, dance and call upon the rain to fall.<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere in South Africa, there is a special group of rain-making girls who, in performing their rites, are "almost naked" and striped with ashes.<sup>14</sup> Among other Bantu groups a woman who had a miscarriage, together with her husband, must undergo a ceremony of purification, both naked, to relieve a drought.<sup>15</sup> Note the similarity to the Chinese idea that abnormal births are drought demons. Among various Moroccan groups, unclothed women play ball games to induce a rainfall; in the Great Atlas women are made to fall over and expose themselves in a tug-of-war for a similar purpose; elsewhere rain can be stopped by a newly married couple lifting their garments to reveal their bodies.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, in Morocco, bad weather can be stopped by a maiden showing her nudity to the sky.

<sup>7</sup> Jacob GRIMM, *Teutonic Mythology* 2 (trans. of 4th edit. London, 1883), p. 593; E. VON DOBSCHÜTZ, "Charms and Amulets (Christian)," *Encyc. of Rel. and Ethics* 3, p. 419; Dan MCKENZIE, "Children and Wells," *Folk-lore* 18.3 (1907) 277-278.

<sup>8</sup> Wilhelm MANNHARDT, *Der Baumkultus der Germanen und ihrer Nachbarstämme* (Berlin, 1875), pp. 329-331; E. GERARD, *The Land Beyond the Forest, Facts, Figures and Fancies from Transylvania* (New York, 1888), pp. 202-203; J. Grimm, *Teut. Myth.* 2, pp. 593-594.

<sup>9</sup> MANNHARDT, *op. cit.*, p. 553. A recent and detailed study of the uses of nakedness in Hungary is the article of Thomas A. SEBEOK, "Data on Nakedness and related traits in Hungary," *Journal of American Folklore* 61 (1948) 356-363.

<sup>10</sup> Karl WEINHOLD, "Zur Geschichte des heidnischen Ritus," *Abhandlungen der königl. Akad. der Wiss. zu Berlin* 33 (1896).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Raimund Friedrich KAINDL, "Zauberglaube bei den Huzulen," *Globus* (1899) p. 253.

<sup>13</sup> Henri-A. JUNOD, "Les conceptions physiologiques des Bantou Sud-Africains et leurs Tabous," *Revue d'Ethnographie et de Sociologie* 1 (1910) 141.

<sup>14</sup> H. W. GARBUTT, "Native Witchcraft and Superstitions in South Africa," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 39 (1909) 550.

<sup>15</sup> W. C. WILLOUGHBY, *The Soul of the Bantu* (New York, 1928), p. 211.

<sup>16</sup> Edward WESTERMARCK, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* 2 (London, 1926), pp. 268, 271, 278-279.

"The sky is ashamed to be covered when the young girl shows herself: the thunder stops and the weather turns fine again."<sup>17</sup> In India, nude rain-making is very prevalent. The women of Bihar strip themselves and drag a plow across the fields to end the drought, just as in Transylvania.<sup>18</sup> This method of producing rain by yoking nude women to a plow is also found among the Gonds and the Korkus.<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere in North India, a downpour may be stopped by a naked woman putting a stool in a courtyard, and hailstorms may be stopped by a naked male sorcerer with a trident and rosary.<sup>20</sup> The Gonds employ a naked bachelor to stop excessive rain, and the Korkus use a naked boy.<sup>21</sup> Note that women are employed for creating rain, men for banishing it. In South India, the Telugus send a nude little girl into the rain with a torch to halt the downpour.<sup>22</sup> In the Bombay area rainfall is halted by the turning of a spinning wheel made of human bones by a naked person, and in the Deccan naked boys with leaves on their heads are the rain-bringers, like the Rumanian rain-maidens.<sup>23</sup> A curious variant of the nudity rite is found in Madras, where women of an agricultural caste ensure a heavy rainfall with a procession whose central figure is an image of a naked human being—this they escort while singing obscene songs.<sup>24</sup> Obscene language often serves the same purpose as nudity. Thus female worshippers of a form of Indra dance and sing obscene songs by night to bring rain.<sup>25</sup> In Assam, the men (including even the Raja) use obscene language to relieve a prolonged drought, while the women strip themselves in the fields by night.<sup>26</sup> Among the Rājibansis of Bengal, the women have a special ceremony for the alleviation of a long drought: they make images of a god from mud or cowdung, and dance naked around them by night, singing obscene songs.<sup>27</sup> Formerly in Formosa the natives went about for considerable periods perfectly nude to insure a normal rainfall, and the shamanesses brought the help of the spirits by appearing stark naked both in the temples and in public.<sup>28</sup> Among the Minangkabau of Sumatra a young boy is escorted

<sup>17</sup> Françoise LEGEY, *The Folklore of Morocco* (transl. by Lucy Hertz, London, 1935), pp. 49-50.

<sup>18</sup> Walter LUPTON, "Har Parauri," *JRAS* (1898).194; Sarat Chandra Mitra, "On the Harparowri or the Behari Women's Ceremony for Producing Rain," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay* 4.7 (1895-99).388.

<sup>19</sup> R. V. RUSSELL, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India* 3 (London, 1916), pp. 106, 563.

<sup>20</sup> Sarat Chandra Mitra, "Further Notes on Rain-Compelling and Rain-Stopping Charms," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay* 7.1 (1904).198.

<sup>21</sup> R. V. RUSSELL, *op. cit.*, 3, pp. 106-107, 562.

<sup>22</sup> M. N. VENKETSWAMI, "Telugu Superstitions," *Indian Antiquary* 24 (1895).359.

<sup>23</sup> R. E. ENTHOVEN, *The Folklore of Bombay* (Oxford, 1924), pp. 321, 323.

<sup>24</sup> J. G. FRAZER, "Agricultural Superstitions in Bellary," *Folk-lore* 18 (1907).332.

<sup>25</sup> G. A. GRIERSON, "Notes on the Rangpur Dialect," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 46.1 (1877).188.

<sup>26</sup> T. C. HODSON, *The Meitheis* (London, 1908), p. 108.

<sup>27</sup> H. H. RISLEY, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* 1 (Calcutta, 1892), p. 498.

<sup>28</sup> Rev. Wm. CAMPBELL, *Formosa under the Dutch described from contemporary records*, pp. 16, 25, 76.

to a river by nearly nude women and there doused with water as a rain-charm.<sup>29</sup>

Ritual nudity in weather magic is a special instance of ritual nudity in fertility magic. I list here some instances of this practice in rites designed to promote an ample harvest, other than those directly concerned with the weather. Pliny observes that a nude woman, during her menstruation, can destroy the vermin in a grainfield.<sup>30</sup> Naked feet, a sub-variety of complete nudity, is a common ritualistic device, and the Roman ceremony called *Nudipedalia* was performed when crops were threatened by excessive heat.<sup>31</sup> Moreover the custom of sending a naked virgin about a field to destroy noxious weeds is reported from the classical world.<sup>32</sup> The Roman rite of Floralia, originally a fertility ceremony, was celebrated with games played by nude prostitutes.<sup>33</sup> In relatively recent times a Scottish woman was accused of attempting to insure the prosperity of her land by revealing her nakedness from the waist down.<sup>34</sup> Numerous rituals involving nudity for the sake of the fertility of the soil are reported among the Finns and Ests.<sup>35</sup> In East Prussia a nude or half-nude woman must go into a newly sown field to avert mildew, and there is a similar custom in Transylvania as a protection against fire.<sup>36</sup> In the eighteenth century in Esthonia, barren women danced naked around a bonfire, and the festival of Midsummer Night in the same area has been compared to a bacchanal, both in respect to nudity and licentiousness.<sup>37</sup> Certain women, comparable to the witches of western Europe, perform fertility-ensuring ceremonies among the Bulgars, always unclothed.<sup>38</sup> In Lusatia, south-eastern Germany, the girls go naked into the fields to make the flax grow.<sup>39</sup> Not for fertility, but to avert the plague, Russian peasant girls, "clad only in their shifts," drag a plow around the village. The single garment seems to be "a modern concession to decency," and the ritual is analogous to the rain-

<sup>29</sup> J. L. van der TOORN, "Het Animisme bij de Minangkabauer der Padangschen bovenlanden," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch Indië* 5.5 (1890).93.

<sup>30</sup> *Naturalis Historiae* 28.23.

<sup>31</sup> Josephus HECKENBACH, "De nuditate sacra sacrisque vinculis," *Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten* 9.3 (1911).29.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>34</sup> J. M. McPHERSON, *Primitive Beliefs in the North-east of Scotland* (London, 1929), p. 236.

<sup>35</sup> A. V. RANTASALO, "Der Ackerbau im Volksaberglauben der Finnen und Esten mit entsprechenden Gebräuchen der Germanen verglichen," *F. F. Communications* 30 (1919).87-88, 31 (1919).127-129.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.7.

<sup>37</sup> Hermann Heinrich PLOSS, Max BARTELS and Paul BARTELS, *Woman, an historical gynaecological and anthropological compendium* 2 (London, 1935), p. 295; Karl PEARSON, *The Chances of Death and other studies in Evolution* 2 (London and New York, 1897), p. 40.

<sup>38</sup> George POLIVKA, "Neuere Arbeiten zur slawischen Volkskunde, 2. Südslawisch in den Jahren 1910-1913," *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* 23 (1913).325.

<sup>39</sup> J. KOŠTÍÁL and T. DANIČIĆ, "Nacktheitzauber," *Anthropophyteia* 8 (1911).288.

making ceremonies of Transylvania and Bihar.<sup>40</sup> In northeast Italy a woman banishes harmful grubs from her turnip field by sitting naked astride a tub and reciting an exorcistic formula.<sup>41</sup> Human fertility is ensured in Morocco by the hopeful women walking naked in a garden on Midsummer Night.<sup>42</sup> For the fertility of the yam crop, all the women of a Nigerian village proceed naked at dawn to a sacred pool.<sup>43</sup> Hottentot girls run about naked in a thunderstorm to make themselves fruitful.<sup>44</sup> In parts of northern India, barren women stand nude in the sun and ask that deity for offspring.<sup>45</sup> In the Bombay area girls are bathed and exposed to the sun as soon as they reach puberty, and in the same region female worshippers of the Pipal tree perform a nocturnal ceremony devoid of clothing. Both of these customs are for the purpose of obtaining children.<sup>46</sup> The fruitfulness of crops is ensured among a pagan people of Celebes by the employment of obscenity by naked women at night.<sup>47</sup> In the Trobriand islands there is a garden rite performed by the women, who are naked.<sup>48</sup> Similar rites have been observed in aboriginal America: Algonkin women went nude into the fields at night to rid the crops of pests.<sup>49</sup> A race between naked men and women featured a ceremony for ripening crops in ancient Peru.<sup>50</sup>

Nudity in fertility rites is an aspect of nudity in general magic and in religion. Nakedness has often been noted as an attribute of witches making magic, as well as a feature of all kinds of religious rites in both the pagan and the Christian worlds. A few examples will suffice, but the interested reader may find many other instances in two surveys of the whole subject, Josephus HECKENBACH, "De nuditate sacra sacrisque vinculis," *Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten* 9 (1911) .3, and Karl WEINHOLD, "Zur Geschichte des heidnischen Ritus," *Abhandlungen der königl. Akademie der Wiss. zu Berlin* 33 (1896). Nudity is often associated with funeral ceremonies (as in China). An instance is the case of Polyxena who was naked when sacrificed to the ghost of Achilles. Moreover possessed seers may use the device of nakedness—thus Cassandra is represented without clothing.<sup>51</sup> In an Eleusinian hymn partly preserved in the *Protreptikon* of Clement of Alex-

<sup>40</sup> E. S. HARTLAND, "Phallism," *Encyc. of Rel. and Ethics*, 9, p. 830.

<sup>41</sup> KOŠTÍÁL and DANIČIĆ, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

<sup>42</sup> WESTERMARCK, *op. cit.* 2, pp. 190, 191.

<sup>43</sup> D. Amaury TALBOT, *Woman's Mysteries of a Primitive People, The Ibibios of Southern Nigeria* (London, 1915), pp. 109-110.

<sup>44</sup> Theophilus HAHN, *Tsuni-|| Goam, The Supreme Being of the Khoi-Khoi* (London, 1881), p. 87.

<sup>45</sup> William CROOKE, *Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (Oxford, 1926), p. 35.

<sup>46</sup> R. E. ENTHOVEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 31, 331-332.

<sup>47</sup> Richard LASCH, "Wachstumszeremonien der Naturvölker und die Entstehen des Dramas," *Globus* 86 (1904) .138.

<sup>48</sup> Ellis SILAS, *A Primitive Arcadia, being the impressions of an artist in Papua* (Boston, 1926), p. 168.

<sup>49</sup> Karl WEINHOLD, *op. cit.*, 33.

<sup>50</sup> J. J. von TSCHUDI, "Kulturhistorische und sprachliche Beiträge zur Kenntniss des alten Peru," *Denkschriften d. kaiserl. Akad. der Wiss., Philos.-hist. Classe* 39 (1891) .25-26.

<sup>51</sup> J. HECKENBACH, *op. cit.*, 9-10, 22.

andria, Baubō, a mythical prototype of the priestess before the deity, coerces Demeter to her will by exposing her private parts.<sup>52</sup> The baring of breasts at funeral rites is a well-known trait of classical culture, and nudity in Roman and Greek magic preceded the naked witches of medieval Europe. Thus Petronius tells that it was a precondition for transformation into an animal, and Medea is pictured nude as she mixes her poison.<sup>53</sup> Nudity is also a regular part of love spells. A medieval (fifteenth-century) Flemish picture shows a naked girl preparing a love potion; in Aru and Tenimber in the Dutch East Indies nudity is a feature of love magic; in various parts of Germany prognostications of love are obtained by a girl standing nude on a hearth and looking between her legs into a chimney.<sup>54</sup> In Poitou, girls who desire greater beauty roll nude in the dewy grass before sunrise.<sup>55</sup> In Tuscany, when consulting the cards for a love prognostication, three girls, always nude, invoke the pre-Christian goddess called La Bella Marta.<sup>56</sup> In nineteenth-century Swabia girls performed a Christmas rite completely unclothed, to determine the wealth of their future bridegrooms.<sup>57</sup> In the Baltic lands nakedness is required both of the layer of spells and him who would remove a spell, as when a hunter charms himself against the power of witches.<sup>58</sup> So also, in Subcarpathian Russia, the witches, when they gather marvelous herbs, are altogether naked.<sup>59</sup> In Germany it is believed that if a person goes naked into a meadow on St. John's Eve, he will be able to identify all the witches in church on the following Sunday, and a woman afflicted with the gout in Northern Switzerland may cure it by performing a ceremony of magic while naked.<sup>60</sup> Nudity as a condition of magic is common in south Slavic countries. This is particularly true of love charms, but also for such purposes as growing a mustache.<sup>61</sup> In ancient Egypt, the female worshippers of the Apis-god revealed their nakedness to him—could this have been an anti-barrenness ritual?<sup>62</sup> The professional

<sup>52</sup> P. L. COUCHOUD, "Le mythe de la danseuse obscène," *Mercur de France* 213 (July 15, 1929).340-341.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 36, 40; see also K. F. SMITH, "Magic (Greek and Roman)," *Encycl. of Rel. and Ethics* 8, p. 283).

<sup>54</sup> PLOSS and BARTELS, *op. cit.*, 2, pp. 165-6, 168, 184.

<sup>55</sup> LEON PINEAU, *Le Folk-lore du Poitou* (Paris, 1892), pp. 498.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Godfrey LELAND, *Etruscan Roman Remains in Popular Tradition* (London, 1892), p. 148.

<sup>57</sup> Anton BIRLINGER, *Aus Schwaben—Sagen, Legenden, Aberglauben, Sitten, Rechtsbräuche, Ortsneckereien, Lieder, Kinderreime* 1 (Wiesbaden, 1874), pp. 381-382.

<sup>58</sup> A. V. RANTASALO, *op. cit.*, 31.128-129.

<sup>59</sup> Pierre BOGATYREV, *Actes magiques rites et croyances en Russie subcarpathique* (Paris, 1929), p. 80.

<sup>60</sup> Moritz BUSCH, *Deutscher Volksglaube* (Leipzig, 1877), pp. 61, 78.

<sup>61</sup> For many examples see F. S. KRAUSS, "Südslavische Volksüberlieferungen, I. Einige Bräuche und Anschauungen, 1. Von der Nacktheit," *Anthropophyteia* 1 (1904). 1-2, and the folktales (nos. 143, 144) about getting the best of the devil through nudity, *ibid.*, 170-174; KRAUSS, "Nacktheitzauber," *Anthropophyteia* 6 (1909).206-211; KRAUSS and KOŠTÍÁL, "Nacktheitzauber," *Anthropophyteia* 7 (1910).287-289; William GODELÜCK and others, "Liebeszauber der Völker," *Anthropophyteia* 7 (1910).274-281; KOŠTÍÁL and DANIČIĆ, "Nacktheitzauber," *Anthropophyteia* 8 (1911).287-288.

<sup>62</sup> Diodorus Siculus 1.85.



witches of Morocco go to cemeteries to collect "moon-water," and there they "take off their clothes, and rush about among the tombs, riding on a reed."<sup>63</sup> In the same country a spell which has prevented the marriage of a girl is removed in a ceremony whose central theme is her complete nakedness, and a rite to give mortal illness to an enemy employs an undressed virgin.<sup>64</sup> Maimonides says, of the ancient Near East: "The mode of worshipping Peor, then very general among the heathen, consisted in uncovering the nakedness."<sup>65</sup> Indeed nudity is reported as a condition of successful magic among the Arabs, whose sky-riding witches were nude (twelfth century), and whose women stripped themselves at funerals (tenth century).<sup>66</sup> In India nudity is a common part of magical rites and a condition of spiritual power.<sup>67</sup> For instance, in Bombay female practitioners of sorcery, in the course of their ceremonies "go quite naked, and apply turmeric and red powders to the body and forehead."<sup>68</sup> In Indochina the female sorcerers of the Chams dance and sing naked before an altar as part of the method of obtaining supernatural power.<sup>69</sup> The witches (*leyak*) of Bali are naked, with exaggerated sexual organs, and like European witches fly naked over housetops; moreover, to see them, one must oneself be naked, and peer between one's legs.<sup>70</sup> In south-east Australia the women stand around the enclosure where boys are being initiated; these women are completely nude and hold torches in their hands.<sup>71</sup> The aborigines of Vancouver Island, when performing the Seal Dance, apparently to ensure the fecundity of that useful animal, were nude.<sup>72</sup>

Ritual nudity has been variously explained. The explanation of the celebrant or magician himself is always interesting, but may be only a rationalization of a custom whose origin is long forgotten. In any case, he need not have a rationalization, since the force of tradition is enough for him, plus the "proved" efficacy of the method. One explanation (given in India) is that the god is coerced to do the will of the celebrant through his fear of "indecentcy," that is, his fear of the shameless exposure of the male or female principles. Such an explanation would seem reasonable in a land much attached to the notion of modesty as applied to the human body. Thus, in Burma an image of the Buddhist saint Shin Upâgôk (Upagupta), apparently identified with the local rain-god, is placed in the sun until rain falls. Curiously enough there is a legend (not found in India) that this saint was once compelled to remain naked as punishment for stealing a boy's clothing. These

<sup>63</sup> Françoise LEHEY, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-179.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189, 197.

<sup>65</sup> M. FRIEDLANDER, *op. cit.*, 3, p. 222 (ch. 45).

<sup>66</sup> J. WELLHAUSEN, *Reste arabischen Heidentums* pp. 159, 195 (2nd edit., Berlin, 1897).

<sup>67</sup> Cf. R. E. ENTHOVEN, *Folk-lore notes*, compiled from materials collected by the late A. M. T. JACKSON (Bombay, 1914), 1, pp. 48, 50-52; 2, pp. 17-18, 20, 85, 88, 92.

<sup>68</sup> R. E. ENTHOVEN, *The Folklore of Bombay*, p. 236.

<sup>69</sup> Antoine CABATON, "Chams," *Encyc. of Rel. and Ethics* 3, p. 349.

<sup>70</sup> Miguel COVARRUBIAS, *Island of Bali* (New York, 1942), pp. 325, 344.

<sup>71</sup> A. W. HOWITT, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (London, 1904), pp. 603.

<sup>72</sup> Gilbert Malcolm SPROAT, *Scenes and Studies of Savage Life* (London, 1868), pp. 66.

two facts, his exposure to cause a rainfall and the tale of his nakedness, seem somehow to be related, and should be viewed from the perspective of the Burmese' normal aversion to nakedness, which he explains as "fear of offending the good spirits."<sup>73</sup> Another explanation (given in Africa) is that female ritual nakedness symbolizes the woman's yielding of herself to a male deity. It will be seen that these explanations are the same as two of those given by scholars as the "basic" or "primitive" reasons for ritual nudity. A list of these follows: 1. clothing pollutes the celebrant, or may disastrously touch and contaminate a taboo object; 2. nakedness symbolizes submission to the will of the god, or the innocence of a child; 3. nudity shows the identity of the celebrant with nature (in this connection MANNHARDT suggests that the leafy garment of the Hungarian rain-maidens is not in fact clothing, but a second skin—the girls have become plants but are still unclothed); 4. knots and similar impedimenta of clothing restrict the flow of spiritual energy (see HECKENBACH); 5. "erotic" nudity induces fertility by imitative magic; 6. exposure of the genitalia (and by substitution, obscene gestures and language) wards off adverse influences and forces the submission of spiritual powers (this idea coincides with the Indian explanation above—exposure looses power which may coerce the deity); 7. a special case is HECKENBACH's well-documented theory that naked feet may draw power directly from the soil. These various hypotheses are not mutually exclusive; all of these beliefs have probably worked separately or together in the development of ritual nudity. The general theory of nudity, so to speak, might be stated as follows: the human sexual organs have magical power, akin to the vitalizing energies of nature. They are normally covered, being taboo objects, as are all things in which spiritual force resides. With the development of "civilization" the religious meaning of this covering is forgotten, and the superstitious belief is replaced by the "moral" attitude which we call "shame" or "modesty." Contrariwise, the exposure of the loins makes their magical power available for immediate use; it is the revealing of a religious object which must take place only during a ritual.

An inescapable observation is that ceremonial nakedness is an attribute of women much more frequently than of men. This fact has been pointed out locally, for instance:

"Ungemein häufig ist die Nacktheit die Bedingung eines Zaubers, u. zwar ganz überwiegend bei Mädchen u. Frauen, selbst bei ehrbaren Hausfrauen, nicht bloss bei Hexen, nur selten bei Männern; auch manche Wahrsagung wird nur nackt möglich."<sup>74</sup>

Moreover the fact is clearly connected with the omnipresence of the witch, the sorceress, the sybil and the female shaman. As was the case in China, so elsewhere in the world (though not universally) the faculty of direct and easy access to the realm of spirits has been the peculiar possession of women.

"Sprenger said, before 1500: 'We should speak of the *Heresy of the Sorceresses*, not of the Sorcerers; the latter are of small account.' So another

<sup>73</sup> Grant BROWN, "The Pre-Buddhist Religion of the Burmese," *Folk-lore* 32 (1921). 85, 98.

<sup>74</sup> Adolf WUTTKE, *Der deutsche Volksaberglaube der Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1869), pp. 170.

writer under Louis XIII: 'For one Sorcerer, ten thousand Sorceresses.'<sup>75</sup>

I have used the Ishtar legend to illustrate ritual nudity in the Western world. Ishtar was "exposed" to the spirit of the underworld. In writing briefly of ritual burning I employ another Western myth whose heroine is "exposed" in a different way to the sun. In both cases the final effect is the regeneration of life in the land. The burning of a witch or shamaness to induce fertility is typified by the classic legend of Semele, beloved of Zeus, who, on being exposed to his full glory, died consumed by flames, giving birth to Dionysus in her final moments of life. Semele is the earth in spring, Zeus the fructifying but scorching sun, and Dionysus the fruit of the soil.<sup>76</sup>

The various forms and motivations of human sacrifice have been studied rather fully. Suffice it to say here that the custom is well known as a device serving the same ends as ritual nudity. Men have been sacrificed to avert the plague, to bring an end to famine, to increase the fertility of the soil, and to bring rain.<sup>77</sup> Copious examples from many parts of the world may be found in Edward WESTERMARCK, *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas* 1 (London, 1906), pp. 442-445, and in the article "Human Sacrifice" in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. Examples of the burning of the victim, however, seem to be relatively rare.<sup>78</sup> Vestiges of ceremonies apparently analogous to the Chinese rite may be readily found, however; the story of fire-ordeals, fire-walking, fire-jumping and the like is well documented for many parts of the world. Some investigators have described the purpose of such rites in much the same terms as those which I have used to indicate the basic assumptions of ritual nudity. For instance, apropos of the priests of Apollo Soranus, an Etruscan deity who walked barefoot over hot coals at the god's annual festival, Lily Ross TAYLOR observes,

"The closest Italic parallel is the custom of springing over crackling straw at the festival of Pales. This custom, identical with the habit, widespread in European lands, of springing over Midsummer and Easter fire, has in it the same idea of the purifying effect of fire that is found in ancient times in the fire-walking ceremonies of the priestesses of Artemis Perasia at Castabala in Cappadocia . . . These ceremonies seem to combine the apotropaic with

<sup>75</sup> Jules MICHELET, *Satanism and Witchcraft, A Study in Medieval Superstition* (trans. by A. R. ALLINSON, New York, 1939), p. 1.

<sup>76</sup> Semele was originally a Thracian earth-goddess, and in the local mythology was the wife of Zeus. Dionysus was a god of fertility and vegetation, and Zeus a sky- and weather-god. See *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft* Ser. 2, 2 (edit. G. WISSOWA, Stuttgart, 1923), pp. 1342-1345. Human sacrifice was once offered to Zeus for rain, see Martin P. NILLSON, *Greek Popular Religion* (New York, 1940), p. 6.

<sup>77</sup> Richard BURTON tells that in Benin he saw a young woman bound to the top of a tall tree as food for the buzzards, and that the natives explained this rite to him as a rain-making charm. See R. F. BURTON, *Abeokuta and the Camaroons Mountains, An Exploration* (London, 1863), p. 1, note 19.

<sup>78</sup> The famous sacrifice of the Skidi-Pawnees to promote the fertility of their lands include the burning of the human victim. See G. B. GRINNELL, *Pawnee Hero Stories and Folk-tales* (New York, 1912), pp. 363-369.

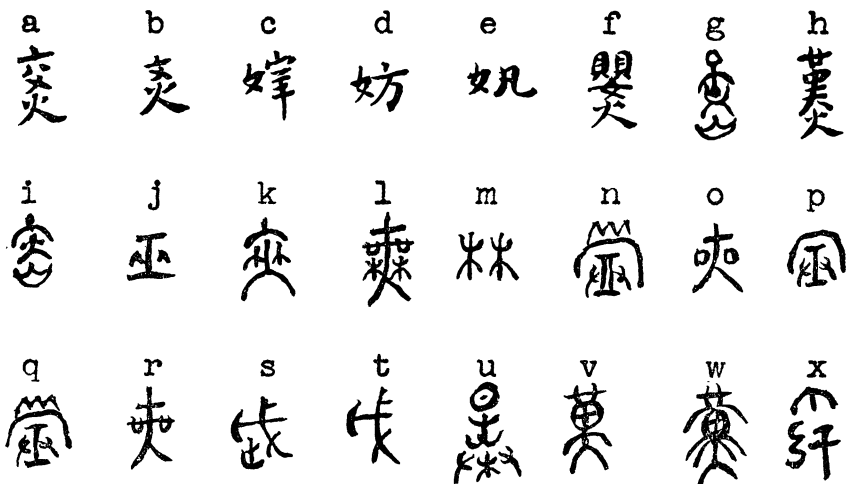
the cathartic, the warding off of evil spirits in future with the exorcizing of evil spirits actually present.”<sup>79</sup>

In general, exposure to fire, like exposure to the sun or dew, has the effect of releasing magical energy to work on the spirit world. The fire may symbolize the sun, and if that is the case, it is the action of the sun, or its spiritual equivalent, which is desired.

The custom of burning witches in Europe may suggest an origin in ancient ritual comparable to that of Shang dynasty China, but at present the idea could not be proved, although it seems to me to be worthy of investigation.<sup>80</sup> The fragmentary nature of the material dealing with ritual burning may be due both to the growth of aversion to human sacrifice (more than to nudity, for instance) as well as to the geographical restriction of ceremonial burning, although further study might prove the latter more widespread than supposed. As for survivals, I quote KARL PEARSON:

“... elsewhere in Swabia a female figure in the form of a witch is burnt, and her ashes scattered over the land to increase its fertility; in Spain it is an old woman with a distaff in her hand, and it seems more than probable that the priestess herself was occasionally, perhaps as representative of the goddess, sacrificed by burning on the sacred hill or drowning in the sacred well.”<sup>81</sup>

PEARSON's final speculation describes the situation in ancient China very well. To this I would add that the burning was a rite symbolizing the action of the life-giving and destroying sun, a rite perhaps preserved in the myth of the unfortunate Semele.



<sup>79</sup> L. R. TAYLOR, *Local Cults in Etruria* (Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome, Vol. 2, Rome, 1923).

<sup>80</sup> Cf. A. E. CRAWLEY, "Fire," *Encyc. of Rel. and Ethics* 7, p. 28: "In ancient theory, burning made its patient divine. The passing of children through the fire is probably due in part to these ideas, and is paralleled by the Greek stories of burning children to render them immortal . . . There can be little doubt that the fires of the *auto-da-fé* were kindled in consequence of the theory of purification by fire."

<sup>81</sup> KARL PEARSON, *op. cit.*, 2, p. 33.



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**THE DRAGON'S WHIM:  
MING AND QING HOMOEROTIC TALES FROM  
*THE CUT SLEEVE***

BY

GIOVANNI VITIELLO

I. August 1763: after almost twenty years of imprisonment in the Roman jails of Castel S. Angelo, Father Lucio U, a Chinese from Nanking, died. He had arrived in Naples in the 1730's to rejoin Father Matteo Ripa, who had been a missionary in Nanking for a few years, raising and training some local youth for the Collegio de' Cinesi in Naples which he himself had founded. Lucio U had not left with him, but, at the expressed wish of Ripa, he was sent to him by ship from Canton, when the Neapolitan for unknown reasons had already regretted calling him and sent a letter trying to stop his departure. Too late. The young U arrived in Naples, and very soon it became evident that the prelate's hesitations had been prophetic: this superb young lad who "dressed like a lord" began committing "nefariousnesses" with his compatriot seminarist Filippo Wang. It seems in fact that Filippo Wang "had committed with the other acolyte Lucio U some grave faults, and in such a secretness that they had been indulging in them for some months, without any one realizing it". After the affair was discovered, the two Chinese planned to escape together, but they were surprised and duly punished "so that, knowing the fault, they would repent, and with a cross on the neck would confess their fault in public refectory". Vexed and chastised by Father Ripa (on whom however were weighing not too veiled accusations of abusing the acolytes—so it was rumoured among his brethren, since the Chinese sojourn), the two anyway did not surrender. The first one to try to escape was Filippo: first to the Convento de' Camaldoli, only to be recaptured by Ripa "in the house of a priest of little sense, a friend of his". On 3 July 1744 it was Lucio U who tried to escape, after they had made him believe in the possibility of going back to the motherland (a plan immediately opposed by Ripa, who feared that the young man would "bring scandal" to China). He escaped hurriedly, leaving behind only a few enigmatic traces: "On July 14th in a hole in the room seventeen and a half carlini, a couple of fake-diamond buttons, and a little smell of tin were

found". He took shelter with Montecassino's diocese, in S. Vittore, where he lived on the Mass offerings; he was then caught again and, again, he escaped, roaming through Central Italy with false documents. He was arrested in Senigallia and entrusted to someone who would take him back to Naples; but the Chinese succeeded one more time in escaping from his jailer. He was finally seized, this time forever, in Foligno, much to the joy of Father Ripa who—since the first flight—had already proposed for him hard labour in Civitavecchia's harbour. In 1746 he was condemned to the galleys and held in confinement in Castel S. Angelo, where he spent the rest of his life (except for some brief periods of freedom because of serious ill health), and there he died, not without—according to the jailers—"having spent his time in a scandalous life".<sup>1</sup>

Let us rapidly move to the Chinese Empire of the time in which one of its citizens was martyred in Rome. Had the unlucky Lucio U never left Nanking, there is no doubt that his life would have been very different. But this is neither the place for conjecture, nor the time for satisfying the temptation to write a fictional life with a happy end. One thing though can be said: in China, at that time, a homosexual relation would hardly have been in itself the cause of a fatal destiny. Male homosexuality in Chinese society was in fact widespread: from the court to the gentry, among the rich merchants of the cities as well as among the common people; it had a long tradition of organized prostitution, often using as fronts the trades of hair-dressers and of bath-house owners; it had a patron god, for whom temples were erected. In the introduction to his *Wusheng xi* 無聲戲 story of a homosexual passion, "Nan Meng mu jiao he san qian" 男孟母交合三遷, Li Yu 李漁 (1611–1679/80) states that his story is something that "the official history cannot record, but [that] unofficial history cannot fail to record".<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact, the occurrence of the theme in Chinese literature—novels, tales, plays and essays—is proportionally far broader than in modern Western literatures. Where we have to wait for *Teleny* (the Victorian anonymous novel attributed to Oscar Wilde), for

<sup>1</sup> See G. Di Fiore, "Un cinese a Castel S. Angelo", in A. Gallotta and U. Marazzi (eds.): *La conoscenza dell'Asia e dell'Africa in Italia nei secoli XVIII e XIX* (Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1985), pp. 219–286. The expressions in quotation marks come from Ripa's journal and from various other documents quoted in Di Fiore's article.

<sup>2</sup> See Helmut Martin (ed.), *Li Yu quanji* 李漁全集 (Taipei, 1970), XII, p. 5387. A translation of the story is in Rainier Lanselle (ed.), *Le poisson de jade et l'épingle au phoenix* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), pp. 307–354, as well as in Patrick Hanan (ed.) Li Yu, *Silent Operas* (Hong Kong: Renditions, 1990), pp. 99–134.

Gide and, above all, for Proust's *Recherche* at the beginning of this century to find the homoerotic theme directly and extensively faced, in the Ming-Qing romantic literary tradition on the contrary, male homosexuality is a topic frequently dealt with. It is, for example, in *Jin ping mei* 金瓶梅<sup>3</sup> and in Li Yu's *Rou putuan* 肉蒲團;<sup>4</sup> in *Rulin waishi* 儒林外史<sup>5</sup> and in *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢.<sup>6</sup> Various stories from Ling Mengchu's *Er pai* 二拍, Feng Menglong's *San yan* 三言, Li Yu's *Shi'er lou* 十二樓 and *Wusheng xi*, from *Shi dian tou* 石點頭, and *Qing shi* 情史, deal with the topic. Moreover, there are three works, namely *Bian er chai* 弁而釵, *Yichun xiangzhi* 宜春香質 and the probably lost *Longyang yishi* 龍陽逸史, written in the mid-seventeenth century, that exclusively treat of love between males.<sup>7</sup> Chen Sen's 陳森 *Pin hua baojian* 品花寶鑑, published in 1849, is entirely devoted to the description of homosexual love affairs between various high officers and young actors of the Qing capital. *Biji* collections like Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578–1642)'s *Wanli yehuo bian* 萬歷野獲編 and Bizhou zhai yutan 敝帚齋餘談, Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (1567–1642)'s *Wu za zu* 五雜俎, Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1797)'s *Zi bu yu* 子不語, Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724–1805)'s *Yuewei caotang biji* 閱微草堂筆記, to mention just a few, describe homosexuality in the society of their times. (The *biji* constitute a crucial source for studies such as this. In fact, the title of Yuan Mei's book might be read as a manifesto of the poetics of a genre that in relishing the extra-ordinary, what the Confucian design does not include, is as a whole a praise of natural anomaly).

Given all this, it is not surprising that someone, under the pseudonym of Ameng of Wu 吳下阿蒙, towards the end of the imperial epoch should decide to sum up this tradition by selecting the most meaningful episodes from history and literature to make what we could call a small specialized erotic anthology. He called it *The Cut Sleeve* (Duan xiu pian 斷袖篇), in tribute to that favorite of Emperor Ai 哀帝 of the Han dynasty, named Dong Xian 董賢, who:

<sup>3</sup> See chs. 35 and 76. Cf., Xiaoming Xiong 小明雄 (pseud.), *Zhongguo tongxing 'ai shilu* 中國同性愛史錄 (Hong Kong: Fenhong sanjiao chubanshe 粉紅三角出版社, 1984), pp. 317–320.

<sup>4</sup> See chs. 7, 8 and 20. Cf. Xiaoming Xiong, pp. 327–328.

<sup>5</sup> See ch. 30. Cf. Xiaoming Xiong, pp. 315–316.

<sup>6</sup> See chs. 9, 28 and passim. Cf. Xiaoming Xiong, pp. 310–314.

<sup>7</sup> On *Bian er chai*, cf. Keith McMahon, *Causality and Containment in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), pp. 73–78. *Yichun xiangzhi* is briefly described in Fang-fu Ruan and Yung-mei Tsai, "Male Homosexuality in Traditional Chinese Literature", in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 14:3–4 (1987), pp. 29–30. *Longyang yishi* is listed as "not seen" in Sun Kaidi 孫楷第, *Zhongguo tongshu xiaoshuo*



“... used to sleep with the emperor. Once, he was taking a nap and was lying on a sleeve of the sovereign’s robe. The sovereign wanted to get up, but Xian was not yet awake. Thus, not wanting to shake him, the emperor cut off his own sleeve, and then got up: so great was his love!”<sup>8</sup>

Who Ameng of Wu was we don’t know. Meng (or Ameng: “A” being an appellative prefix) is the name of Lü Meng 呂蒙, who was a minister of Sun Quan 孫權 (years of reign: 222–229); Wu 吳 is the region that includes, among others, the city of Nanking, the home of the wretched Lucio U. It is very probable that it was this region that the author of the *Duanxiu pian* came from, as it was from there that Lü Meng came. Of the latter it is said that, when accused by the king of not knowing the books, he became in a short time so learned that one of the king’s ministers, impressed, exclaimed: “But this is not the same Ameng of Wu!”<sup>9</sup> The expression has survived in modern Chinese and is still used today about someone who has changed to the point of being unrecognizable: it is in this sense that the pseudonym of the compiler of the anthology has probably to be interpreted.

*The Cut Sleeve* includes fifty-one short stories and anecdotes that deal with the homoerotic theme, chronologically arranged from the fifth century B.C. up to the nineteenth century—a choice of records from history and folklore bound by this single thread. Forty of the tales were already included in the twenty-second chapter (*Qing wai* 情外, “Love: Homosexuality”) of *Qing shi* 情史, a collection probably edited by Feng Menglong (1574–1646).<sup>10</sup> The *Qing shi* seems to have served as the main source for Ameng of Wu’s work. Of the remaining eleven stories, six come from *Yuewei caotang biji*, one from Xu Yue’s *Jian wen lu* 見聞錄.<sup>11</sup> As for the other four, I was not able to trace their origin.

We do not know the exact date of the work, but it is certain that it was compiled not later than 1910, the year of the first printed edition of *The Cut Sleeve* in the *Xiangyan congshu* 香艷叢書, edited

*shumu* 中國通俗小說書目 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1982), p. 180.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Han shu*, ch. 93, p. 3733 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962). The *Zhonghua shuju* edition of the dynastic histories has been used for all the references and the quotations from those historical documents in this paper.

To my knowledge, the only complete translation of *The Cut Sleeve* is the one I have done, into Italian: Ameng di Wu, *La manica tagliata*, a cura di G. Vitiello (Palermo: Sellerio, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Sanguo zhi*, ch. 54, pp. 1273–1281 (Beijing, 1959).

<sup>10</sup> For this work, cf. Huayuan Li Mowry, *Chinese Love Stories from Ch’ing-shih* (Hamden: Archon Book, 1983).

<sup>11</sup> In Wu Zhenfang 吳震方 (ed.), *Shuo ling (hou ji)* 說玲(後集) (Xuegu tang, 1705).

between 1909 and 1912 by a scholar named Chong Tianzi 蟲天子.<sup>12</sup> As an approximate terminus post quem we can take 1805, the year of death of the writer Ji Yun, author of the *Yuewei caotang biji*, very likely one of the latest sources used by the compiler of the anthology. Van Gulik, mentioning the anthology, dates it back to the seventeenth century and considers the *Xiangyan congshu* edition a "reprint".<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately I have not been able to find an earlier edition. The work could still be a seventeenth century work, if we could provide evidence that, for instance, all the tales in the *Duanxiu pian* coming from *Yuewei caotang biji* actually come from an earlier work, in other words that the two works share a third source. We can notice, however, that (a) there is no overlapping between the stories reported by Ji Yun and those included in the *Qing shi*; (b) the eleven tales that are not part of the *Qing shi* material are, with no exception, found after the latter; finally (c) the four tales of unidentified source are found scattered among the tales from *Yuewei caotang biji*. Given that the anthology is, as said, chronologically organized, such an arrangement suggests that the four tales of unknown source are chronologically close to Ji Yun's material (or possibly that together with the latter they constitute a block of eleven entries coming from a single collection, using various sources among which also Ji Yun's *Biji*). Finally, the year of publication of the anthology does not necessarily indicate that it was written in a range of years immediately preceding it. Even if the compilation by Ameng of Wu was completed at the beginning and not at the end of the nineteenth century, it wouldn't be too great a surprise if a few decades passed before it was printed, a phenomenon very common in China.

I have deliberately chosen to discuss here only the Ming and Qing material contained in *The Cut Sleeve*. I have chosen to do so because as far as the kind of sources and the epochs are concerned, we can divide the text into two parts: the Ming and Qing material constitutes the second half of the anthology, while the other half is mostly composed of Han material, coming primarily from *Shi ji* and *Han shu*.<sup>14</sup> In the latter section a few episodes refer to pre-imperial time; a few to the Three Kingdoms and to the North-South Division; only one dates to the Tang and one to the Five Dynasties Period; we have nothing from the Song and nothing from

<sup>12</sup> The *Duanxiu pian* (hereafter DXP) is in vol. IX ch. 2.

<sup>13</sup> See Robert Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China* (Leiden: Brill, 1961), p. 63, note 2.

<sup>14</sup> See *Shiji*, ch. 125 (Beijing, 1959); *Hanshu*, ch. 93.

the Yuan dynasty. Moreover, although in the first half we have stories from a broad variety of epochs, nevertheless almost all of them are historical records. The narrative pattern they conform to derives from the *Shi ji*'s "Biographies of Favorites" (*Ningxing zhuan* 佞幸傳), and their settings are, almost without exception, the Imperial Courts. A study of homosexuality in China based on these sources would be therefore necessarily a study of the relationship between emperors and their male favorites.

The situation is quite different when we look at the second half of the anthology. Between "Wang Chengxiu" 王承休 (the last entry of what I consider here the first half) and "Director Wang" 王祭酒 (the first of the second half) there is a gap of about half a millennium. By the end of the Ming dynasty the Chinese social and literary panorama had radically changed. The rising of a middle class and the affirmation of its culture determined an irrevocable transformation in the aesthetical taste; vernacular literature finally received a legitimization, not only by the market but also by part of the intelligentsia. These new factors reflect on the tales constituting the second portion of *The Cut Sleeve* that are the object of this study, in that they influence their language and their setting. One can notice, in fact, that the language of these tales is in the majority of cases a classical language interspersed with vernacular expressions; that the writer's objective, having abandoned the rarefied atmosphere of the imperial courts, now gravitates towards the markets and the theatres; it focuses on the countryside villages and on the houses of Soochow merchants. Emperors and favorites have withdrawn to the wings leaving the stage to students, petty officers, monks, soldiers and shepherds. These come to represent an erotic experience that is necessarily more varied, because it is developed in a far more dynamic context. In the stories of the first half of the anthology the imperial power frames any partner—their gender, in fact, being irrelevant—in the passive role of a "favorite". But in the stories of the second half, we find romances between men who favour each other. The distribution of their sexual roles is less predictable, and so is the representation of the romantic experience, in which reality and fantasy often intersect, the boundaries between the two suddenly blurring and leading us into the epic world of popular legends, with all their mythological legacy of lustful dragons, trials in the Other World, greedy gods and fox-spirits.

It should be clear by now that in doing research on homosexuality in China, the problem does not lie in the scarcity of the material, particularly if one decides to look at Ming and Qing society and

literature. As a matter of fact, the topic could be dealt with in more than one way. One could concentrate mainly on issues of social history, or of morality, or medicine, or literary representation; one could pursue a parallel investigation of both male and female homosexuality.<sup>15</sup> The focus of this essay is the analysis of the Ming and Qing stories in *The Cut Sleeve* and of the ethical view of male homosexuality that emerges from them. Nevertheless I will consider necessary, now and then, to open digressions on more or less directly related issues, in the belief that this may help drawing a fairer picture of the stories' cultural background.

II. Before beginning the discussion I would like to review briefly the vocabulary of Chinese homosexuality, and in particular the most frequent expressions indicating it, as they can be found in the Ming and Qing literature under consideration.

Today in China, homosexuality is usually referred to as *tongxing'ai* 同性愛 or *tongxinglian* 同性戀. The two synonyms are a translation of the term "homosexuality", imported quite recently from western languages. But traditionally there was no such a word. In fact, in the entire first half of *The Cut Sleeve* there is no specific term at all to indicate homosexual love, sex, or inclination as opposed to heterosexuality. Emperors "favor" (*chong* 寵 or *xing* 幸), and the chosen ones are "favorites", disregarding their gender. It is, though, in pre-Han and Han times that the literary vocabulary of homosexuality took shape. Expressions such as *fentao* 分桃 ("divided peach"),<sup>16</sup> *longyang* (from the "Lord of Longyang" 龍陽君),<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> On homosexuality in China there are two studies in Chinese—the already quoted work by Xiaoming Xiong and an earlier one by Weixingshi guanzhaizhu 唯性史觀齋主 (pseud.), *Zhongguo tongxinglian mi shi* 中國同性戀秘史 (Hong Kong: Yuzhou chubanshe, 1964). These two books have the undeniable merit of gathering a remarkable amount of sources covering a span of time which goes from the Zhou to the present; their analysis, though, is too often insufficient. Recently a book has been published in English, Bret Hinsch's *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Unfortunately Hinsch's work shares the very shortcomings of its predecessors, with the aggravating factor of consistently inaccurate translations (for a more thorough discussion of this work, see my review in *Journal of Homosexuality* 25 no. 4 (1993)).

Although there are some examples of literary works dealing with lesbianism (for instance, Li Yu's play *Lian xiang ban* 蓮香班), this topic is far less frequently encountered. A chapter of Xiaoming Xiong's book is dedicated to lesbianism (pp. 271–278).

<sup>16</sup> The expression *fen tao* refers to an episode recorded in *Hanfei zi* (ch. 12). The passage has been translated in Burton Watson (ed.), *Han Fei Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), pp. 7879. Also included in DXP, p. 1b.

*duanxiu* 斷袖 (“cut sleeve”), all alluding to famous homoerotic passions reported in the ancient books, were used through the centuries by Chinese literati to refer to homosexuality. When the literary allusion became a specific term, it is hard to say. However, in the Tang text from Dunhuang *Tiandi yinyang jiaohuan dale fu* 天地陰陽交歡大樂賦, by Bai Xingjian 白行簡 (Bai Juyi’s 白居易 brother), the term *duanxiu* is used as a verb,<sup>17</sup> showing that the expression has become simply a descriptive term that one could include in a dictionary.

The most common word used to describe homosexuality in Ming and Qing sources is *nanse* 男色, which literally means “male beauty”, and could probably be also translated as “sex with men”, since *nanse* is opposed to *nüse* 女色, “sex with women”. The two words express two spheres of the male desire, since in fact the expression *hao nanse* 好男色 = “to be fond of sex with men” is without exception used in reference to a man and never to a woman. The reference point of the sexual desire is the man, and from his standpoint homosexuality and heterosexuality seem to represent only two different options. It might be remembered that in contemporary Japan these words (*nanshoku* 男色 and *joshoku* 女色) have the exact same value.<sup>19</sup>

The expression *nanfeng* 男風 (“male custom”, or better: “homosexual custom”) is also frequently used. Sometimes the character for “male” is substituted with the homophonous character meaning “south”.<sup>20</sup> This has probably to do with the often expressed belief that homosexuality is a custom imported from the South, particularly from Fujian and Zhejiang. (There is probably a historical basis for this, as will be seen. I do not think this

<sup>17</sup> The Lord of Longyang was probably the favorite of King Jia 假王 of Wei (years of reign: 227–225 B.C.). The episode is recorded originally in *Zhanguo ce*, ch. 25, pp. 917–918 in the *Shanghai guji chubanshe* 上海古籍出版社 edition (Shanghai, 1985). The passage has been translated in J.A. Crump Jr. (ed.), *Chan-Kuo Ts’e* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 449–450. The story of the Lord of Longyang is included in DXP, p. 2a.

<sup>18</sup> *lüanchen duanxiu yu dishi* 變臣斷袖於帝室 (“beautiful subjects serving as male lovers in the imperial chambers”). See Ye Dehui 葉德輝, *Shuangmei Ching’an congshu* 雙梅景閣叢書, (Changsha 1902?–1908?); the passage is at page 9 in the 1922 reprint of the text.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Paul G. Schalow, “Male Love in Early Modern Japan: a Literary Depiction of the ‘Youth’”, in Martin B. Duberman, Martha Vicinus, George Chauncey, Jr. (eds.), *Hidden from History* (New York: NAL Books, 1989), pp. 118–128; in particular at p. 119 he discusses the relation between *joshoku* and *nanshoku*.

<sup>20</sup> In Li Yu’s *Wusheng xi* story, for instance. See *Li Yu quanji* 李漁全集, XII, p. 5381.

expression can be associated with, for instance, the expression “French vice” that the British used to employ to refer to homosexuality, which clearly encompasses the dual purpose of using a prudish periphrasis and of attributing to foreigners an immoral conduct).

In Ming and Qing stories another term often occurs in compounds in reference to homosexuality, and this is *wai* 外, literally meaning “external” and therefore sometimes “other”, “heterodox”, “deviant”. The section dedicated to homosexuality in Feng Menglong’s *Qing shi* is called “Qing wai” 情外. To this are related the expressions *hao wai* 好外 (“to be fond of men”), *waish* 外色 (= *nanse*), *waijiao* 外交 (“engage in homosexual relations”), *waishi* 外事 (“homosexual love affairs”), *haowai bi* 好外癖 (“the passion”, “the weakness for men”), *waichong zhi hao* 外寵之好 (“the love for boys”), *waiwu* 外侮 (“homosexual offense” = sodomy). Considering that *wai* can also refer to the husband (from the standpoint of the wife, still now called *neiren* 內人 or *neizi* 內子, “the person who is inside”), one could hypothesize that *wai* in this case qualified “the love with/for men” in contrast/ as an alternative to the one with/for women. I tend to believe, though, that there is in this term a mild connotation of “deviance”, in the sense that heterosexuality is obviously—if not for other reasons than for a proportional one—the norm, against which homosexuality is defined.

The expression *qidi* 契弟, which refers to the younger partner in a homosexual relation (it means “bond younger brother”), is never used in *The Cut Sleeve*, but it is used by some Ming writers. It seems to have had at that time a specific meaning, and to indicate a particular Fukienese social institution, which we will have occasion to discuss later. In this case *qidi* is the counterpart of *qixiong* 契兄, the elder partner in such a homosexual bond. These terms belong also to the Edo Japanese vocabulary; Schalow thinks that they refer to a special kind of homosexual bond, where the age difference between the two partners was only of a few years.<sup>21</sup> At the same time the sole word *qidi* seems to be used as a synonym of *xiaochang* 小唱, the Ming term for male prostitute, later substituted by the word *xiangong* 相公. This seems to be the connection with its usage in modern Cantonese, where the word has acquired a derogative connotation. It should be kept in mind, though, that in the Ming sources it is simply a descriptive term, without any implication of moral judgement. *Tu'er* 兔兒, “little rabbit” probably had a de-

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Ihara Saikaku, *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, translated, with an introduction by P.G. Schalow (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 28.

rogative connotation, although its origin is unclear (and even more mysterious is indeed the accident of the identical symbolical valence of the rabbit in ancient Rome and Middle Age.<sup>22</sup> Besides, it could not be too derogative if the God in charge of homosexuals was called in Fujian “God of the Rabbits”.

III. The study of any issues related to sex in the Chinese cultural context cannot ignore the Taoist theories on sex, and in particular their speculations on the relation between sex and immortality. For this reason I believe that even a short discussion of what can be construed about the religious—in particular Taoist—standpoint in regard to homosexuality could be usefully introduced here.

Unlike many Christian traditions, where sex has always been viewed as a temptation, a major obstacle in the path towards God, in ancient Taoism it was seen as one of the special fields of self-cultivation. Ancient Taoist practices and rituals involving sex were considered part of the training of the adept to gain immortality. Taoist cosmology and physiology are based upon the belief that every form of life is the result of the interaction between two forces, *yin* 陰 (female, passive, dark, etc.) and *yang* 陽 (male, active, bright, etc.). It follows immediately that men and women incorporate both elements. It was believed that the sexual meeting with a woman (through the contact with her *yin* potential) allowed the male adept to reinforce his *jing* 精 (“seminal essence”) with a consequent benefit for his *qi* 氣 (“breath” or “vital principle”). Taoist physiology identifies the *qi* with the principle of life, and therefore also of eternal life. The semen, *jing*, is a male’s most precious property, and for this reason it has to be carefully guarded and properly enriched.<sup>23</sup>

The reverse was also contemplated, and some texts therefore warn the adept from having sexual contacts with women who, knowing sexual techniques, could use the exchange of essences to their advantage. This fear has given birth to a whole literature on sexual vampirism, usually involving demons who disguise themselves

<sup>22</sup> See John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 306 and passim.

<sup>23</sup> These ideas are also at the basis of the complex of practices that go under the name of *huan jing bu nao* 還精補腦 (“to guide the semen back in order to replenish the brain”). On this topic cf. Henri Maspero’s “Methods of ‘Nourishing the Vital Principle’ in the Ancient Taoist Religion”, in his *Taoism and Chinese Religion* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1981), pp. 445–554. See also the work by van Gulik already quoted.

as beautiful women and who seduce young men, and, thereby, sap their *yang* potential.

If sex, thus, is a means to Perfection, one wonders whether the use of such practices is unvarying with regard to the gender identity of the partners. The basic sources used by Maspero and van Gulik—the first scholars to explore the topic of sexology in connection with Taoism—are the few extant sex manuals. But since these manuals were meant to be used by heterosexual couples, they do not talk about homosexuality at all. Speculating on the Taoist perspective on male homosexuality, van Gulik sums up his evidence by saying:

Literary sources in general adopt a neutral attitude as long as it [i.e. male homosexuality] is engaged in by two grown-up persons, it being taken that intimate contact between two *yang* elements cannot result in a total loss of the vital force for either of them.<sup>24</sup>

One can expand upon this by saying that in a religion in which physical and spiritual immortality coincide, and the concepts of sin and sickness are strongly related, sexual hygiene is at the same time an ethico-religious and a medical issue. It follows logically that a certain sexual practice that is considered dangerous from a medical point of view will also carry a moral sanction; vice-versa, if there is no moral disapproval towards it, it is likely that, also from the point of view of the sexual theories, that practice will be regarded as harmless at the very least.

This hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the fact that, when the author of the sixteenth-century materia medica *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目, Li Shizhen 李時珍 (1518–1593), talks about *feinan* 非男 (“non-male”) and *feinu* 非女 (“non-female”), he always refers to a deficiency in the reproductive function, and never to anomalies in sexual behaviour.<sup>25</sup> There seems to be no idea of homosexuality as a sexual perversion, or as sickness, in Chinese traditional medicine. Moreover, to my knowledge, homosexuality never appears in the Taoist scriptures as an object of interdiction.<sup>26</sup> The reason for this silence may well be that the medical as well as the moral criteria according to which male-male sex was traditionally perceived were

<sup>24</sup> Van Gulik, p. 48.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Charlotte Furth, “Androgeous Males and Deficient Females: Biology and Gender in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century China”, in *Late Imperial China*, vol. 9:2 (1988), pp. 1–31. In particular see pp. 4–5.

<sup>26</sup> For interdictions in some Buddhist texts, see Wolfram Eberhard, *Guilt and Sin in Traditional China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 63–64.



basically the same as for male-female sex. The main issue, in medicine as well as in morality, seems to be elsewhere. A homosexual liaison can be, in fact, as dangerous as a heterosexual one in that it may cause, through excessive activity, a dispersion of the vital spirit. The loss of *qi* from a merely pathological standpoint is the origin of sickness and eventually the cause of death, while, in general, from the religious point of view it represents an obstacle to the attainment of immortality.

Despite the lack of specific references to male homosexuality in Taoist literature, some literary sources, in particular fiction, often provide some grounds for speculation. Thus, without referring to primary religious sources, I shall discuss a few tales—most of them included in *The Cut Sleeve*—in which homoeroticism is connected with Taoist themes, assuming that they may reflect, although indirectly, the vision of Taoists on sex between males.

In “The Carpenter’s Son”,<sup>27</sup> a Taoist priest falls in love with the young son of a carpenter, and one day, using some charms, hypnotizes him and brings him to his house to seduce him. He is twice on the verge of satisfying his desire, but both times refrains at the last moment. Here is the description of the first wave of remorse:

The priest pulled him towards the bed; he caressed and hugged him, blandishing him with seductive words. He had just stripped and come up close to him, when—vexed—he suddenly withdrew, and sitting up said: “I cultivated the Tao for more than two hundred years to be defeated by this beautiful boy?”

For a long time he reflected on it. Again he lay down next to the boy, watching and caressing his whole body, and with regret said: “But such a beautiful boy, even in one thousand years, it would be difficult to meet! Even if I indulge in lust, thus violating my Tao, yet, if for two hundred years I exercise my vital spirit, what is the use of remorse?”<sup>28</sup>

Finally, the priest, to extinguish his desire, resorts to stabbing himself in the arm. For this reason he is praised at the end by the commentator.

It is clear that this story does not involve a moral condemnation of homosexuality. There are in fact no reasons to believe that the hesitation of the Taoist is due to the fear of committing a sinful act, in which the sin would come from the homosexual nature of the union. The sin (that is, the danger for health), in this case, is in having sex. The sexual nature of the relation is very likely to be irrelevant, since the fact that the sexual union is between two males does not weaken the validity of the general rule expressed in the sex

<sup>27</sup> *Mugong zi* 木工子, DXP, pp. 18b–19a.

<sup>28</sup> DXP, p. 19a.

manuals that loss of semen affects the project of self-cultivation. The Taoist's behaviour exemplifies the principle of "internal alchemy" (*neidan* 內丹), according to which the disciple of the Tao should, so to speak, make love inside himself, with his own *yin* and his own *yang*, without needing a partner at all.<sup>29</sup>

"The Two Old Men"<sup>30</sup> first tells the story of a young man who sodomizes an old man, and then, as a sort of explanation, a second story about two old men who are lovers. In the ending the commentator expresses his surprise at the two accounts and reflects on the meaning of those sexual affairs. He mentions a theory attributed to a certain Immortal Ma Xiutou 馬繡頭 (about whom I was not able to find further information) who stated: "There is in them [i.e. the boys] a real *yin* essence which can be grasped. It belongs to the revitalizing techniques; one can have sex not only with women, but also with men".<sup>31</sup>

The commentator seems to be ready to accept the theory (though confining it to the realm of popular magical cults, believing that it cannot belong to orthodox Taoism), but still his objection is: "But in grasping the essence of an old man, what advantage can there be?"

Similarly, the story "The Old Gardener",<sup>32</sup> about an old man having a homosexual affair with a male ghost who used to be his wife in a previous life (but believed by some to be a fox-spirit), concludes with the following comment:

Somebody says: "It was a fox that wanted to seduce the old man, that's why he made all that story up". But, in fact, when foxes seduce, they do it because they are attracted by beauty and in order to absorb the vital spirit. But a chicken skin or a crane hair, what beauty do they have to enjoy, what vital spirit to suck?<sup>33</sup>

The tone of the commentator is basically the same in both instances. Surprise at something that is hardly understandable, an eccentricity on the border of enigma. By contrast, it is indirectly suggested that, if the older man had sodomized the young man, or the young man sodomized another young man, or the fox-spirit had selected a young victim instead of an old one, in all such cases homosexual relations would have been considered normal, in the sense of

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Kristopher M. Schipper, "Science, Magic and the Mystique of the Body", in Michael Beurdeley (ed.), *The Clouds and the Rain: the Art of Love in China* (Rutland: Tuttle, 1969), pp. 14–20.

<sup>30</sup> *Liang sou*, 兩叟, DXP, pp. 19b–20a.

<sup>31</sup> DXP, p. 20a.

<sup>32</sup> *Pan sou*, 潘叟 DXP, pp. 18a–b.

<sup>33</sup> DXP, p. 18b.

rational (although, in the case of the fox-spirit, in a vampiristic logic). The cause of the commentator's surprise is the age of the partners. The stress is on the fact that a sexual union with an old man cannot be functional or nourishing in the process of augmentation of *qi*, given the weakness of their *jing*. A sexual relation between two old men who have—as hinted at by the commentator in the first of the two stories—“retired deep into the mountain to cultivate the Tao”, does not make any sense, because sex with an old man cannot cause any physiological improvement effecting the transformation of a human being into an immortal.

The surprise at the young man raping the old man is also socially motivated, given the unusual distribution of roles. A young man is more likely to play a sexually passive role, unlike the one in this story. Old men playing an active role would not generate surprise, unless involving an excessive sexual activity, as shown by the story entitled “Zhang Youwen”,<sup>34</sup> in which an old man, asked by a friend about the secret of his good health, given that he has numerous young male lovers, answers with the following joke: “On this matter my Tao is this: to use the *Sūtra of the Heart* a lot, and the ‘*Sūtra of Testicles*’ only a little. That’s why I don’t get any sickness”.<sup>35</sup>

Behind the friend’s question there is obviously the belief that sexual activity in old age should be reduced. Just as behind the old man’s answer there is the confirmation of that belief, together with the suggestion that aesthetic appreciation of a young beauty can partially replace sexual activity while benefitting health. It is important to keep in mind that these ideas refer to sexuality in general, although they happen to be expressed here in a homoerotic context.

The position attributed to the Immortal Ma Xiutou reflects the vampiristic motif that seems to underlie much of Taoist theories on the nourishment of *qi*. The concept of the young man as a source of nourishing energies expands the theory of the sex manuals on the benefits of sleeping with young women. The perspective is unchanged: on the one side we have the Taoist, the cultivator of immortality, and on the other side the sources of energy—now a woman, now a boy, now the moon-rays, now cinnabar. Ma Xiutou is not praising male homosexuality *per se*, but rather young men as an optional source of energy for self-cultivation in the immortality process. His affirmation refers to boys (*tong*), even if in his

<sup>34</sup> DXP, pp. 14a–15a.

<sup>35</sup> DXP, p. 14b. The *Sūtra of the Heart* (Xin jing) is the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*.

conclusive formula he talks about “sex with women” and “sex with men”, without making distinctions on the basis of age.

Some stories involve homosexual relations between human beings and demons or gods.

When demons (often fox-spirits) are involved, the sexual pattern behind the story is always the same. A devilish creature in disguise (sometimes a woman, sometimes a young man, sometimes an invisible being) seduces a young man who eventually gets sick, and dies unless positive magical powers come to his aid. What is described is a sexual vampiristic experience, the exploitation of somebody's energies by a succubus. An example in *The Cut Sleeve* is “The Young Shepherd”, the story of a boy raped by a fox-spirit which is finally persuaded to abandon its victim.<sup>36</sup> The homoerotic tales of *The Cut Sleeve* on this topic represent a variation of the vast Chinese literary theme of sexual vampirism.

The stories entitled “The Graduate Lü Zijing” 呂子敬秀才<sup>37</sup> and “The Quans' Son and the Zhangs' Son” 全氏子、張氏子<sup>38</sup> involve the divinity Wulang 五郎神 (or Wutong 五通神), known for his lust for young women.<sup>39</sup> His strongly sexual characterization explains his versatile desire.

Of “Lü Zijing” I will talk again later. Suffice here to say that it is the story of a young scholar whose lover has been kidnapped by the god Wutong. “The Quans' Son and the Zhangs' Son” is divided into two episodes. In the first one Wulang takes away a young man from a family of Soochow merchants by employing him as his assistant (and consequently causing him to die). In the second episode the death of a young man, also a victim of Wulang, is avoided thanks to the talismans and the incantations of a magician.

These last two stories do not stress the aspect of sexual vampirism of demons. Wulang here seems to be more drawn to certain men because of a selective romantic attraction, than by a blind vampiristic compulsion. Yet, it remains clear that the kidnapping by a demon—even though by a demon in love—leads to a fatal destiny, the same way contact with a succubus does.

What would happen if a human had a sexual relation with an Immortal instead of a demon? Could it be nourishing for the man's

<sup>36</sup> *Mu tong*, 牧童 DXP, pp. 16a–b.

<sup>37</sup> *Lü Zijing xiucai*, DXP, pp. 15b–16a.

<sup>38</sup> *Quan shi zi, Zhang shi zi*, DXP, p. 15a.

<sup>39</sup> Sometimes the name indicates a team of five gods. Cf. Wolfram Eberhard, *The Local Cultures of South and East China* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), pp. 61–63.

*qi*? Given the fact that sex is a vehicle for the transmission of vital energy, it should follow that, from the point of view of an adept, for instance, sexual union with a Taoist master or with an Immortal should be regarded as augmenting the vital spirit, and therefore profitable.

Such an hypothesis seems to underlie the behaviour of the protagonist of a story included in Feng Menglong's *Jingshi tongyan* 驚世通言. "A False Immortal Creates Great Confusion at the Temple of Huaguang"<sup>40</sup> tells of a beautiful young scholar named Wei, who is visited one night by a man who claims to be the Immortal Lü Dongbin,<sup>41</sup> who has come to help the young scholar to transform himself into a supernatural creature. The boy is very flattered and grateful, and invites his benefactor to stay for the night. Once in bed, the supposed god asks the young Wei to uncloth himself so that his own energy can influence him more effectively. To eliminate any trace of doubt in the young man's mind, Lü tells him the story of the Han general Huo Qubing 霍去病 (140–117 B.C.), who had fallen ill after having refused the sexual advances of a god. The latter, beseeched then by Huo's friends to save his life, says that he knew of Huo Qubing's physical weakness, and had come to offer him a chance of being nourished by his own "extreme *yin*" (*taiyin* 太陰). The general had not understood the good intentions of the god, and so had died.

Convinced by the story the "Immortal" has told him, Wei becomes his lover. Their relation turns into a *ménage à trois* when the "Immortal" one night brings along a beautiful lady whom he introduces as the Immortal He Xiangnu 何仙姑.<sup>42</sup> She is also said to be able to give him "extreme *yin*". The three of them engage in a long secret relationship, and the young scholar becomes more and more seriously ill. His father asks then for the help of a Taoist master, who is defeated by an apparently superior devilish power. Meanwhile, in his delirium, Wei reveals the whole story of the nocturnal visits. Wei's father and friends proceed to make a sacrifice at the Temple of the Bodhisattva Huaguang. The Bodhisattva informs them that the two "Immortals" were in fact male and female turtle-spirits. The gods, moved, have already sought them out and beheaded them. The Bodhisattva recommends that Wei's father make a soup with the turtle-spirits' shells buried under a certain tree, and have the young man drink it. So it happens and

<sup>40</sup> *Jia shenxian da nao Huaguang miao* 假神仙大鬧華光廟, *Jingshi tongyan*, ch. 27.

<sup>41</sup> One of the Eight Immortals.

<sup>42</sup> The only woman among the Eight Immortals.

quickly the young Wei regains his vital essence and therefore his health.

I conclude: a) the homosexual theme is secondary, the stress being rather on the devilish vampirism and on the related problem of loss/ augmentation of vital spirit; b) in theory, in a homosexual union, a profitable exchange of vital potency can take place, as shown by the discourse of the false Immortal Lü and by the consequent behaviour of the young man, who clearly is lured by the illusion of transfusing his divine essence into his own body. The validity of such an hypothesis is further supported by the mythological account—in a heterosexual frame—about the attainment of Immortality by He Xiangyu herself, which took place when the Immortal Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓 released his semen during sexual intercourse with her.<sup>43</sup>

I think it is justified to sum up by saying that Taoist discourse on homoeroticism, as reflected in these literary sources, does not involve moral or medical condemnation. Homosexuality poses an enigma only when involving old men as passive partners, or when sexual excess (homosexual as well as heterosexual) does lead to a deterioration of health. As for sexual contacts with supernatural beings, if they are demons they cause loss of *qi* and eventual death; if they are Immortals they may on the contrary be profitable on the path to Immortality.

IV. I will now talk about an aspect that is not my main focus here (besides, it has been treated elsewhere quite at length),<sup>44</sup> but that, I think, helps in clarifying the social background of these stories. Even though *The Cut Sleeve* stories don't involve it directly, male prostitution constitutes a large and quite well documented aspect of male homosexuality in Ming and Qing China. Various sources suggest that the status of male prostitutes in society was basically the same as that of their female counterparts, if not higher at times. Such a fact is obviously relevant to a discussion of the way homosexuality in general was viewed in late imperial China.

For the Ming dynasty we have numerous witnesses, both among

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Kristopher M. Schipper, *Le corps taoïste* (Paris: Fayard, 1982), pp. 212–213. A similar account is also given about the goddess Xi Wangmu (see Maspero, p. 530).

<sup>44</sup> See mainly Wang Shunu 王書奴, *Zhongguo changji shi* 中國娼妓史 (Shanghai, 1935). See also Colin P. Mackerras, *The Rise of the Peking Opera* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), who discusses in several places the relation between theatre and homosexuality (or actually, that is what I take him to mean when he talks about “vice”, “deviation”, “immorality”, etc.).

Chinese and Western writers. Western travellers to China in the sixteenth century—Galeote Pereira, Gaspar da Cruz, Matteo Ricci<sup>45</sup>—never fail to be scandalized by the lightness and ease with which homosexuality—and male prostitution in particular—appeared to be taken in the Central Kingdom. From the other side, the Chinese seemed to have had difficulty understanding what caused such a fierce indignation.<sup>46</sup> The comparison between the Chinese and the Western sources provides, I believe, a neat sense of the difference of perspective.

Let's hear the voices of some of those witnesses.

Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛, from his *Wu za zu* 五雜俎:

Today everybody says that homosexuality started in the regions of Min and Guang, but in fact from Wu and Yue to Yan and Yun, there is nobody who does not know this passion. Tao Gu 陶穀 (903–970) in his *Qing yi lu* 清異錄 says that there were in the capital young men who were making merchandise of their own body, and they did so openly. So we know that this custom was already existing at the time of the Tang and the Song. In the capital there are the “young singers” (*xiaochang*) 小唱 for special use in the banquets of the gentry. Since in fact officials are not allowed to frequent female-prostitutes, they are forced to use them. At the beginning they were all coming from Ningbo and Shaoxing in Zhejiang, but nowadays half of them come from Linqing. So there is a distinction between southern and northern singers. However, in the various groups the beautiful ones are a rarity; therefore if there is a handsome one the gentry put all their efforts to try to get him. It is like the whole country has gone crazy: this is really quite funny! When officials are sent on assignment, they arrange so that they are assisted by attendants, as a form of replacement [for women]. The officials are bewitched by them to the point that often their behaviour becomes a cause of criticism. For beauty and skills the singers coming from the Northwest cannot compete with those coming from the Southeast.<sup>47</sup>

Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) from his *Della entrata della Compagnia di Giesù e Christianità nella Cina*:

But what can be most pitied in this matter, and most reveals this people's misery, is that among them not only are practiced the natural lusts but also the unnatural

<sup>45</sup> For Pereira and da Cruz, see C.R. Boxer, *South China in the Sixteenth Century* (Nendeln, Lichtenstein: Kraus, 1967), pp. 16–17 and 223. For Matteo Ricci, see Pasquale d'Elia, *Fonti Ricciane* (Roma: La Libreria dello Stato, 1942–1949); Jonathan Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 201–231, provides an analysis of Ricci's references to homosexuality in China.

<sup>46</sup> See, for instance, Zhang Xie 張燮, *Dong xi yang kao* 東西洋考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), p. 249; the passage is quoted in Albert Chan, “Chinese-Philippine Relations in the Late Sixteenth century to 1603”, in *Philippine Studies*, 26 (1978), p. 71.

<sup>47</sup> *Wu za zu* (in *Guoxue zhenben wenku* 1:13, Shanghai, 1935), p. 305. See also Shen Defu 沈德符, *Yehuo bian* (Taipei, 1975), pp. 1640–1641.

ones, which is neither forbidden by law, nor considered illicit, nor even a cause of shame. And therefore people talk about it in public, and practice it everywhere, without there being anyone to prevent it. And in the towns where this abomination most reigns—as here in the capital—there are public streets full of boys got up like prostitutes, and, similarly, there are people who buy these boys and teach them to play music, sing and dance. And then, very gallantly dressed and made up with rouge like women, they enflame men drawing them to this infamous vice.<sup>48</sup>

Both authors confirm the special popularity of male prostitution in the capital. But the attitude of the two writers is, as one can see, very different. Xie Zhaozhe describes a phenomenon, the proportions of which are a cause of amazement for him, maybe even of amusement, but certainly not of moral indignation, as with Ricci. It is interesting to note that Xie Zhaozhe suggests that the reason for the male prostitutes' popularity had to do with the prohibition on the officials frequenting the capital's female brothels (therefore the picture given must be meant to refer only to the city of Peking). This interdiction was inherited by the Manchu government, under which the unprecedented blossoming of male prostitution probably also profited from the 1772 law that forbade women from performing. This latter provision—which was paradoxically meant as part of the program of moralization carried out by the Qing government—was especially influential in assuring male prostitution, traditionally strongly connected to the milieu of theatre, a status of popularity in Peking which began to decline only after the fall of the empire.

As for the laws against sodomy in the Qing code (*Da Qing lüli* 大清律例), first introduced in 1679 and then again in 1740, they seem to have been mainly concerned with rape rather than, with homosexuality itself. Meijer, in his article on cases of homosexual rape in *Xing'an huilan* 刑案匯覽,<sup>49</sup> remarks also that punishments were relatively light in China, especially in comparison with what was happening in Europe, where sodomites, if no longer burned (as in Matteo Ricci's time), were still put to death in great number. In fact, the cases in *Xing'an huilan* in which the death penalty is imposed always seem to involve a major crime, such as homicide. Meijer also remarks: "The social censure did not prevent a shop-keeper living with his male assistant without sustaining any prejudice in his trade. It seems that one could be a perfectly honest homosexual".<sup>50</sup> In this sense I would not talk about "homophobia

<sup>48</sup> See d'Elia, vol. I, p. 98.

<sup>49</sup> Cf., M.J. Meijer, "Homosexual Offences in Ch'ing Law", in *T'oung Pao* 71: 1-3 (1985), pp. 109-133.

<sup>50</sup> *ibidem*, p. 130.



in the Qing dynasty”—as Vivien Ng does.<sup>51</sup> One can possibly consider that these laws prove the homophobia of the Manchu Government, but this is also questionable, lacking an explanation for the absence of laws against male prostitution. Certainly the general impression is that Chinese society was not affected by homophobia at all.

“Tout Chinois qui se respecte pratique, a pratiqué ou pratiquera la pédérastie”—said to J.J. Matignon a friend of his who had lived in Peking longer than he had. The French doctor, who travelled in China at the beginning of the century, listed among the “crimes” that he wanted to number in his book *La Chine hermétique: superstitions, crime et misère*, also homosexuality.<sup>52</sup> As a good scientist, he witnessed that the only real reproach the Chinese public opinion made on homosexuality was “une influence néfaste sur la vue”.<sup>53</sup>

Most of the Peking male brothels at that time were concentrated in the Eight Big Alleys, in the Qianmen quarter.<sup>54</sup> The prostitutes were not called *xiaochang* anymore, but *xianggong* 相公, or else *xianggu* 像姑.<sup>55</sup> The *xianggong* were mostly actors, in China as well as in Japan,<sup>56</sup> a social category mostly engaged in prostitution. Wang Shunu 王書奴, comparing the training of male and female prostitutes in Qing China, as well as the technical vocabulary and the ritual of reception of the clients, concludes that there were basically only terminological differences.<sup>57</sup> The *xianggong* were educated and trained in their way of speaking, walking and glancing, so that they would resemble women. The process started very early, when they were about four or five years old, and they were trained for several years in singing and poetry, and at the same time prepared, with regular massages and dildos, to know men, which happened when the boys first reached adolescence. Matignon, who went there—as he stresses, out of pure cultural curiosity—tells us that the guest, as he entered, was entertained with songs and erotic stories, and would be offered a pipe of opium. The

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Vivien Ng, “Ideology and Sexuality: Rape Laws in Qing China”, in *Journal of Asian Studies*, 46: 1 (1987), pp. 57–70.

<sup>52</sup> The chapter is entitled “La pédérastie”. The book was published in Paris for the first time in 1901 and then reprinted in 1936. The quotation is from page 263.

<sup>53</sup> *ibidem*, p. 268.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Xiaoming Xiong, pp. 183–191.

<sup>55</sup> *ibidem*, p. 173 and ff.

<sup>56</sup> See Schalow (1990), Introduction.

<sup>57</sup> See Wang, pp. 322–328.

*xianggong* could be hired by rich lords for the occasion of banquets and parties, and they cost—adds Matignon—at least twice the price of female courtesans. (Matignon reports a friend's melancholic complaint on the price of gay pleasure: “Oh, les petits acteurs! C'est bien joli, mais c'est bien cher . . .!”).<sup>58</sup> Female impersonators or not, sexually they took a passive role. They wore make-up like women and they were appreciated for aesthetical qualities quite similar to those determining the beauty of a courtesan. In general male prostitution involved a form of physical and psychological transvestism. The adoption of a female persona, although related to performance (particularly, but not only, in the case of female impersonators), contributed to ‘feminize’ the identity of the young man. Hence, his sexual role, as mentioned, was always passive. No distinction between *catamiti* and *exoleti*, i.e. passive and active male prostitutes, as in the prostitution of Classical Rome,<sup>59</sup> seems to have existed. (The unbendable distribution of roles is of course theoretical, since we don't really know what actually happened in the bedrooms between prostitutes and patrons; recent polls on the sexual performances requested by customers from transvestite prostitutes working on the streets of Rome reveal, for example, that most of the customers ask to be sodomized).

V. Ming and Qing literary sources (and references in Western contemporary works on China) concerning homosexuality and the way it was morally perceived, convey the image of a society in which a man could have a wife, concubines and children, and be at the same time fond of young men;<sup>60</sup> he might even have had a stable affair with one of them, without feeling he was living a contradiction, or offending moral sense. Homosexuality was more than socially tolerated; it was common and widely accepted in that it was regarded as an option for a male individual to satisfy his sexual desire. However, in order to be morally acceptable, homosexuality had to stay within certain boundaries. In general, homosexuality is never condemned *per se*. Moral condemnation is encountered only when other major moral issues are involved, or when it constitutes an obstacle to the fulfillment of the individual's

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Matignon, p. 279.

<sup>59</sup> See Boswell, p. 79.

<sup>60</sup> This emerges quite clearly from reading, for instance, Arthur Waley's *Yuan Mei* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957). Fictional characters, such as Ximen Qing 西門慶 in *Jin Ping Mei*, or Xue Pan 薛蟠 and Jia Lian 賈璉 in *Honglou meng*, are also examples that support this argument.

basic social duties. In particular, homosexuality could not be adopted as a total alternative to heterosexuality. Such a behavior would have clashed with the moral duty of reproduction, the first expression of filial piety.

This is a standpoint from which some stories dealing with homosexuality are written, but it is not the only one. There are instances, in fact, where the Confucian, social-centered ethical system is rejected in favour of what I would call a romantic ethic, in which the only possible crime is the betrayal of the romantic oath.

To elaborate on the contrast between these two different ethical viewpoints from which homosexuality is looked at in our sources, will be the main goal of this last section.

Although homosexuality seemed to pervade all strata of Chinese society of the time, in Ming and Qing literature it is often remarked that the province where the *nanfeng* was most diffused was Fujian. In his *Zi bu yu*, Yuan Mei tells us that there was even a temple dedicated to a real patron-god of homosexuals, the Temple of the God of Rabbits (*Tu'er shen miao* 兔兒神廟). It is said that a certain Hu Tianbao 胡天寶 fell in love with a beautiful Regional Inspector just arrived to Fujian. One day the officer surprised the man “hiding himself crouched in the toilet to sneak a look at his butt”. Hu had to confess; the governor was enraged and had him beaten. He died of a cudgelling, but a surprise was waiting for him:

A month passed, and Hu appeared in a dream to a man in his village and said: “My death came as a direct consequence of having offended an honourable man with a feeling against morality. But in the end it was love, a sudden obsession; my action cannot be considered on the same level as common crime. All the officers of the Obscurity laughed at me and made fun of me; there was nobody who was mad at me! Today the Officer of the Darkness has invested me with the title of God of the Rabbits, to take care of matters specifically concerning those men in the world who enjoy other men; you can raise a temple for me, and let people come to burn incense”.

It is known about Fujianese people having a betrothal among males. When they heard this man in the village reporting the words from the dream, they competed in raising money to build a temple. And in fact, the divine potency responded like an echo. And all secret lovers, and those who desired something they couldn't get, would all go there to pray him.<sup>61</sup>

One can notice—but on this I will say more later—that the account, besides indicating the lack of bias against homosexuality in Fujian, also illustrates the contrast between two moral systems—the one of the Inspector, the guarantor of the social order—and the

<sup>61</sup> *Zi bu yu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), pp. 458–459. See also *ibidem*, pp. 572–573, for a similar account on a shrine in Guilin.

one of the gods, who obviously consider homosexual love simply as a form of love, and on the basis of a romantic ethic make a divine hero of the toilet-voyeur.

It is no accident that Li Yu sets his *Wusheng xi* 無聲戲 story in Fujian, and precedes it with a prologue stressing the special diffusion of homosexuality in that province. A land where there are even trees called *nanfeng shu* ("Southern custom trees", where the pun between "south" and "male" is evident), which hook younger trees enclosing them in their embrace; a land where pederasty is a collective obsession, where male beauty contests have the gravity of provincial examinations. Of course, Li Yu is a satirist, but the fame of Fujian in this regard must have some historical basis, confirmed as it is by various sources. "Fujianese men appreciate male beauty, and all the young men there take care of their looks and draw much pleasure from that . . ."—says *The Cut Sleeve* story "An Examination Inspector",<sup>62</sup> and, more extensively, Shen Defu 沈德符 in his *Bizhou zhai yutan* 敝帚齋餘談 so describes this peculiarity of the Fujianese:

The Fujianese men are extremely fond of male beauty. No matter if rich or poor, handsome or ugly, they all find a companion of their own status. Between the two, the older is called 'bond elder brother' (*qixiong* 契兄), the younger 'bond younger brother' (*qidi* 契弟). When this elder brother goes to the house of the younger brother, the parents of the latter take care of him and love him like a son-in-law. And the 'younger brother's' expenses, including those for his marriage, are all covered by the 'elder brother'. They love each other and at the age of thirty they are still together, sleeping in the same bed like husband and wife. And if adultery is committed, then the accusation is of 'fe-men' adultery. The character meaning 'fe-man' cannot be found in any dictionary, and in fact it is a word that the Fujianese themselves made up.<sup>63</sup>

Such passion can be so deep that it is not uncommon that two lovers, finding it impossible to continue their relationship, tie themselves up together and drown themselves. This as far as people of the same age are concerned. But recently there was a man who liked 'bond sons' and, being himself an adult, liked to make love to them. Therefore, spending a large amount of money, he gathered handsome and gracious boys to instruct them about the pleasures of the bedroom. Regarding himself as a father, he put all the young boys in the children's room, committing the fault most disordinate and contrary to the norm. I heard it said that this was a custom started by the pirates. Since it is not allowed to take women on the vessel, otherwise the ship would sink right away, they take male lovers instead, and the ship-captain is called 'bond father'.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> *Mou duxue* 某督學, DXP, p. 15b.

<sup>63</sup> The character 𠂔 is made by the substitution of the inferior part of the character "male" (*nan* 男) with the character meaning "female" (*nü* 女). Its modern pronunciation is *ji*.

<sup>64</sup> *Yutan* (in *Zuili yishu* 橋李遺書, Wang yun xian guan, 1880), pp. 31b–32a.

A few things can be construed from the passage quoted above. One is that, socially, homosexuality did not constitute an absolute alternative to heterosexuality. The “elder brother” pays for the expenses of the “younger brother”’s wedding. In China, in fact—traditionally and in a certain way also nowadays—it is of utmost importance to fulfill the social duty of having offspring, consequently assuring the continuation of the ancestors’ cult. Homosexuality cannot be the only form of sexuality of an individual: in this sense the Chinese conception is closer to that of the Western classical world than to the concept of “gay lifestyle” that is establishing itself in contemporary Western societies. However, if in Chinese society homosexuality was not accepted as the only form of sexuality, nevertheless it would seem clear from the passage above that one could, at least in Fujianese society, live a homosexual relation parallel to a heterosexual conjugal one. Shen stresses, in this regard, the fact that the lovers stay together, not only after marrying, but also when they have reached the age Confucius considered that of maturity, when the personality becomes stable (*sanshi er li* 三十而立).

Another thing to be remarked upon is the mention of “fe-men” adultery, which shows the application of the same moral principles (and legal provisions) that would be used in judging a case of a woman’s adultery, in the judgment of the younger partner of a homosexual couple. It is clear that the sexual roles of the partners are quite sharply distributed. The “younger brother”’s role—as the word “fe-man” also shows—seems to be associated with that of a woman. As a result he is also treated as a woman from the juridical point of view. At the same time, there is no evidence that “younger brothers” were actually assuming a female persona, as in the case of male prostitutes. Though, on the other hand, Shen elsewhere seems to make no distinction—if not of a terminological nature—between *qidi* and *xiaochang*, the latter being—as we have seen—the standard word for male prostitute in late Ming literature.

The tone of the author is quite neutral as long as the relationship involves people of approximately the same age (“sibling-lovers”, so to speak); the cases of joint suicide clearly appear to his eyes as examples of the depth of passion that can animate a homosexual liaison (implicit is the comparison with heterosexual ones). His moral principles are offended only in cases involving children, the relation being perceived in such a case as virtually father-son incest.

Shifting back to the *Cut Sleeve* stories, we can observe that the main point remains the same. The male-male couple, or simply a

sexual encounter between two men, is never immoral *per se*; homosexuality does not violate the Confucian ethical system as long as it respects the boundaries of propriety assigned to it—the hierarchies of the social pact.

To illustrate this point further let us examine the only story in the anthology where there is ostensibly a criticism of homosexual love. “Two Favourites”<sup>65</sup> reports two accounts, and ends with a condemnation of male love, substantiated by a series of historical examples of people ruined by having bestowed their favour on men. Yet I believe it is important to see what precedes the critique, the kind of situation presented in the story which arouse the commentator’s indignation.

The first episode reported in the story is about a man who, seeing his young lover dying, promises him not to make love to women nor to men anymore. When the boy cruelly states his disbelief, the man almost cuts off his own penis. In the second episode a man arranges a pompous funeral for his deceased lover; he is distraught with an extreme pain, “more than [such a?] love would require”. Thus, the first man is caught on the verge of an insane gesture (the self-mutilation) and of making insane resolutions (not to make love to either sex anymore), while the second mourns his beloved “more than one would do for a son or for a younger brother”. In both cases the acts are described as excessive, inappropriate, and therefore contrary to the moral norm. The protagonist of the first episode risks compromising his filial duty (maybe not assuring offspring, and moreover cutting a part of his body, thereby breaking a basic taboo concerning the entirety of the body, especially in relation to the burial ritual). The second man is breaking, with his excessive love and mourning, the hierarchy of affections, in which a male lover (or for that matter a concubine) does not deserve a mourning comparable to that which a wife, a son or a younger brother would deserve. In this sense they are both going beyond the edge of “ritual propriety”. As a result, I think, it is not the feeling of a man towards another man that attracts disapproval here, but rather the excessiveness, i.e. the anti-ritual aspects and effects of their feelings. In fact, the story’s commentator also clearly states that, should those feelings be channeled into the operation of the Confucian morality system, then homosexual relations would become “a fragrant example of the Five Human Relations”.

In a similar fashion, Yu Huali in “Liang the Student”<sup>66</sup> is

<sup>65</sup> *Liang chongtong* 兩寵童, DXP, pp. 20a–b.

<sup>66</sup> *Liang sheng* 梁生, DXP, p. 13b.

criticized by the authority because he “has chased too many boys”. Again, it is the excessive aspect of his hunt, not the passion in itself, that is the target of the criticism.

In the case of “The Dongxiang Rascal” 東鄉太歲,<sup>67</sup> the protagonist has seduced a boy who is then forced by his father to hang himself. Consequently, because of the inescapable karmic law, he is involved in a case of corruption, goes to jail, bears the shame of having his wife seduced by the boy’s father, and in turn ends up hanging himself. Even in such a case he seems to be punished by the gods mainly because his behaviour has indirectly caused a death, rather than because he has seduced a boy. The latter’s age is not specified in the story, but it is clear that corruption of a minor is not an issue here. Elsewhere, though, in “A Mighty Man”,<sup>68</sup> we find the claim that, while women are lustful by nature, boys are only like that because corrupted too young. The interesting comment of a Buddhist priest on the behaviour of a gentleman who had bought children to train them in gay sex goes as follows:

Such things have always existed in this world; I cannot command a benefactor of the convent like you to refrain from them! Actually, if they consent, then it is exactly like going with female prostitutes: in this case the fault is rather light. But if one tries in any way to break a child’s naivete, then one will incur the Gods’s anger!

Some stories involve public officials, such as “Director Wang”,<sup>69</sup> a Hanlin academician having an affair with a student. Yet, in itself this behaviour does not bear an inherent moral fault, nor is it the automatic cause for a charge of corruption.<sup>70</sup> As illustrated in “An Examination Inspector”,<sup>71</sup> real corruption starts when an official selects candidates on the basis of their beauty and not of their talent. For this the official is reported to his superiors and loses his job. Yet, this does not seem to make him suffer an unbearable shame:

When he was dismissed from his official post, hundreds kept on coming every day to take their leave; they were all young and beautiful, like a team of jade blossoms.

<sup>67</sup> *Dongxiang taisui*, DXP, p. 17b.

<sup>68</sup> *Mou jushi* 某巨室, DXP, p. 17a.

<sup>69</sup> DXP, p. 12b.

<sup>70</sup> It is interesting to notice that in classical Chinese sodomy (whether with a man or with a woman) is often referred to as “the Hanlin custom” (*Hanlin feng* 翰林風), probably because of the special diffusion of such a practice in that institution. See R. van Gulik, *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming Period* (Tokyo, 1951), vol. I, pp. 211–212.

<sup>71</sup> DXP, pp. 15a–b.

They followed him for days. They followed and followed, not wanting to leave him.

Back in his village, he did not blame himself for having lost his post. On the contrary, he would raise the topic to boast about it, as if he had accomplished some memorable deed.<sup>72</sup>

Of course, it could be that the Inspector's lack of shame is meant to shock the reader, but one has the impression in general that homosexual desire was not felt as shameful. There is, though, one story, in which this is the case. In "Indulging in Lust Outside the Law",<sup>73</sup> an old man declares that he practices sodomy with women both to avoid further offspring and because "fishing amongst male beauties would be a cause of shame for sons and grandsons". We can also remark here, though, that homosexuality is implicitly presented as an immediate alternative to heterosexual love, to the love which produces offspring. The old man describes his own behaviour as "an expedient", or "a compromise" between the two forms, needing to justify it as a strange one that arouses curiosity, in that it is certainly more unexpected than sodomy with boys.

In the stories considered above homosexuality is described exclusively as a form of sex and never as a romantic bond. In these particular cases I think that the lack of attention to the area of feelings is due to what I called the "social" moral perspective; however, in other cases this very lack can be differently motivated, and may have to do with the writer's personal interest and goals. A good example is provided by Li Yu's dealing with homoeroticism in his works. As a matter of fact, Li Yu seems not as much interested in homosexuality, as he is in using the theme as a device for his satirical or comical effects. In the already mentioned *Wusheng xi* story he uses homosexuality to construct a perfectly exemplary story from the Confucian point of view, with the only exception that the celebrated virtuous mother, the main character of the story, is a transvestite. Li's goal is satirical: it is the overturning of a hero of Confucian morality in order to ridicule the latter's myopia. The theme works mainly to the development of Li Yu's own poetic discourse on his culture.

His *Shi'er lou* 十二樓 story<sup>74</sup> describes a harmonious *ménage à trois* involving two antiquarians and their handsome shopkeeper; the harmony is eventually shattered when a mighty official takes a fancy to the boy, and schemes to have the boy abducted and

<sup>72</sup> DXP, p. 15b.

<sup>73</sup> *Fa wai zong yin* 法外縱淫, DXP, p. 19b.

<sup>74</sup> *Cui ya lou* 萃雅樓 (VI).



eventually castrated. Despite all this, the dominating tone of the story is comical. Even when feelings are talked about, they are either mocked (the boy saying that he won't sleep with the official, because, if a virtuous woman won't have two husbands, how can a virtuous boy have three?), or at least evaluated in a very reductive way (when the two antiquarians hear that, if they will protest, they will risk being eviscerated themselves, they quickly send their companion off). Finally, everybody in the story (and Li Yu included), apart from the boy, seem to see homosexuality merely as an exotic and sophisticated pleasure for libertines. The boy is a bed delicacy, and is chased by a procession of greedy mandarins coming to the shop (which sells—not by chance!—antiques, flowers and rare incense), just as a precious Burmese jade or a Song porcelain would be sought after by a collector. And, after all, a precious object can be lent with no harm done—as the officer's guard suggests to the two antiquarians, who in fact, although unwillingly, end up accommodating to the blackmail and to the loss without much heroism. This motif would not interest Li Yu in the least; he has no intention of weaving a praise of love, he just wants his audience to laugh, with that cynical laughter that is his own.

Apart from Li Yu, though, love (*qing* 情) is one of the major themes in Ming and Qing fiction, and *The Cut Sleeve* in this regard is no exception. In many of its stories the discourse on *qing* in fact plays a central role, thereby making the exploration of homoeroticism both more complex and more complete. The shift of stress to the sphere of feelings implies a change in the way the homosexual experience is viewed and presented; the social ethic becomes inadequate, and is therefore supplanted by an ethic the pivot of which is the romantic ideal.

The last tale of the collection, “Qinshu” 琴書,<sup>75</sup> tells the love story of a petty officer, a certain Zhang, and his servant Qinshu. It is a tragic one, since a series of unfortunate coincidences forces Qinshu to sell himself to another man. Here is the last scene, a furtive farewell, which is also the final scene of the anthology, and undoubtedly meaningful in regard to its perspective:

So they went to a desolate temple to tell each other of the time they had been apart. Zhang gave him a sable collar, two rings and all sorts of little objects. He said: “Today for the two of us is the last time. We can only make an appointment in the next existence. Seeing this collar and these rings, you will think of when I

<sup>75</sup> *Qinshu*, DXP, pp. 20a–22a.

caressed your neck and held your hand. Serve well my successor. From this moment on, we say goodbye forever”.

Qinshu was sobbing and couldn't speak. Then he untied his hair. He untied it and wept. Then he pulled out the knife he used to carry on his belt, cut a lock of hair and, offering it to him, said: “You have always loved my hair. Today I do not have anything to give you for our parting; this is the only inheritance from my parents: so I want to express my feelings. I beg you to take care of yourself: only Heaven could express this heart of mine! And even if the sea dried up and the rocks rotted, I will never betray you. If it is possible, write me a note, and I will run to you at once! Seeing this lock you will think of me; our appointment is fixed for eternity”.

When they stopped talking, their tears were falling down like rain.

The ancients said: “A single note of the song *He Manzi* 何滿子, and tears flow down on the lord's face”.

Who can say that love between men is in any way different?

Zhang went back home. He was grieving and disturbed. There was not a single day it was not so.

And, in fact, at the beginning it was passion, then fear, and finally sadness. And always he entrusted himself to poetry to express the inclinations of his heart”.<sup>76</sup>

The contrast between *qing* and *se* 色 (“sex”, “sexual attraction”) is central to “Wan the Student” 萬生,<sup>77</sup> the story of a student who falls in love with another student he has seen only once at the theatre. Wan hopes to meet him again soon, but Zheng—this is the name of the other—is sent by his family to study in another city. When, later, they meet again, Wan finds that the young man's beauty has completely vanished, but not his own feelings. They become lovers and live together, challenging the derision of the town's youths who cannot understand why Wan can love an unattractive man. The viewpoint around which the story is constructed (very likely to be the same as its author's, who is supposed to be Feng Menglong) is made very clear in the concluding paragraph:

As for love, is there anybody in the world who could compete with Wan and Zheng? Some people say that Zheng was a totally ordinary person, that certainly he did not have the qualities of the Lord of Longyang 龍陽君<sup>78</sup> or of the Lord of Anling 安陵君,<sup>79</sup> and yet he had received a favour equal to the one of the brocade

<sup>76</sup> DXP, pp. 21b–22a.

<sup>77</sup> *Wan sheng*, DXP, pp. 13b–14a.

<sup>78</sup> For the Lord of Longyang, see note 17.

<sup>79</sup> The story of the Lord of Anling also comes from *Zhanguo ce* (ch. 14, pp. 488–491); see Crump, pp. 227–229. He was the favourite of King Xuan 宣王 of Chu. The text included in DXP (pp. 2a–b) is followed by a poem by Ruan Ji 阮籍 (220–280) from *Yutai xin yong* 玉台新詠, ch. II, pp. 7a–b in the *Sibu congkan* edition.

quilt<sup>80</sup> and of the golden bullets;<sup>81</sup> and that finally the young Wan had made a mistake by loving him. But, if to be loved one has to be beautiful like the Lord of Longyang or the one of Anling, then it is only a matter of sexual attraction (*se*): but what about love (*qing*)? Besides, even if one has a face as beautiful as a peach or a pear flower, that sooner on or later will wither!<sup>82</sup>

The romantic ethic is in a certain way subversive. It, in fact, justifies in the name of love even a behavior that breaks the rules of social propriety that I have discussed above.

In "The Soldier",<sup>83</sup> a merchant's son falls in love with a granary night-guard. Using false documents, he manages one night to go to visit him. They have just made love, when the adventurer sees another handsome man there watching the moon; the soldier does not mind, he can go and try to seduce him. But the man refuses his advances. They get into an argument; afraid of being discovered, the merchant's son kills him. The soldier, feeling that, if his admirer hadn't come to visit him that night, there would have been no crime, decides to protect him and go to jail in his place. The latter, full of gratitude, at the beginning often goes to visit his benefactor in jail; later, though, the visits become more and more sporadic, until they finally stop. The soldier, feeling betrayed, reveals the truth to the judges, and therefore the real criminal is put to death. If this had been a parable of social morality, then the story would have concluded here. But for a man of *qing* the common laws, the relative rules of society and of its pragmatic ethic, mean very little. His vow of love is irrevocably broken. The only natural conclusion, at this point, according to romantic ethic, is to take away his own life.

<sup>80</sup> The "brocade quilt" refers to "The Lord of Xiangcheng" 襄城君 (DXP, pp. 1b–2a); its original source is *Shuo yuan* 說苑, ch. 11. The Lord of Xiangcheng yielded to the courtship of the Great Master Zhuang Xin 莊辛 after the latter told him the story of the boatman from Yue. His master, Sir E 鄂君, one night heard him singing a love poem dedicated to him, and, moved covered his shoulders with a brocade quilt. The poem, also included in the DXP, comes actually from *Yutai xin yong* (ch. IX, pp. 3b–4a).

<sup>81</sup> The "golden bullets" are a reference to Han Yan 韓嫣, the favorite of Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty (years of reign: 140–87 B.C.). The text is included in DXP (p. 4b); originally it comes from *Shi ji* (ch. 125, pp. 3194–3195). "Yan loved sling shooting; he often used golden bullets. He would lose more than ten of them everyday. In Chang'an there was a saying which went: 'If you are cold and hungry, follow the golden bullets!'. The children in the capital, every time they heard that Yan was going out, would immediately follow him. They would look where the bullets fell, and would go to gather them".

<sup>82</sup> DXP, p. 14a.

<sup>83</sup> *Bingzi* 兵子, DXP, p. 13a.

In the above-mentioned "Lü Zijing"<sup>84</sup> we have the description of a young man who "nearly goes mad" after his boyfriend disappears. He leaves his house, abandons his studies, and wanders in search of his beloved. In the end the intensity of his feelings is rewarded. He meets another young man—a ghost, in fact—who tells him that his friend has been kidnapped by God Wutong, and helps him in rejoining him . . .

After this Lü bought a boat and, taking along the two men, left his family and sailed on the [Yangzi] River towards the South.

Many years passed and he didn't come back.

But in posterity people saw them often. They would now appear, now disappear: always the three of them.<sup>85</sup>

The power of his love makes of Lü Zijing a romantic and revolutionary hero who, leaving his duties (towards his family and society) and in fact giving up life, has morally gone beyond common sense. He has challenged death, and has become immortal.

Similarly, in a story in *Shi dian tou* 石點頭,<sup>86</sup> two young men, while students in a monastery, become lovers. Their affair remains undisturbed for some time, until some envious classmates—the scene is reminiscent of the one involving Qin Zhong in *Honglou meng*<sup>87</sup>—report them. The two then decide to escape; they send their servants back home carrying letters of farewell and disengagement from betrothal. They take refuge to a distant mountain, where they build a hut and live in a state of blissful madness, only receiving every once in a while the visit of a holy hermit. But a servant has secretly followed them and, once home, tells his masters. The two lovers' families, angry guardians of the social order, engage then in an expedition which resembles a crusade; they will return these two rebels to society, who have dared to subtract themselves to all social duties and ties. They are disillusioned, because at their arrival the two lovers have just died together. On the grave two trees have just grown, suddenly, and their branches intertwine inextricably, the cosmical confirmation of an eternal romantic bond. Their defection from social propriety has made them enter into myth; and in front of the divine sign the police-families' rage cannot but melt instantly and turn into awe. When

<sup>84</sup> DXP, pp. 15b–16a.

<sup>85</sup> DXP, p. 16a.

<sup>86</sup> *Pan Wenzi qi he yuanyang zhong* 潘文子契合鴛鴦塚 (XIV). See also Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 162.

<sup>87</sup> *Honglou meng*, ch. IX.

the two betrothed girls commit suicide, providing thereby a rich sacrifice, then the beatification ceremony is perfect.

These stories, as I said, suggest a contrast between two ethical systems. The incompatibility between love and social morality lies in the intrinsic anti-social nature of the former. These stories speak of what in a passage in *Bian er chai* 弁而釵 (where a man who has just made love to a boy explains to him why he should not feel guilty) is expressed as the contrast between Love and Reason:

If we go by the logic of Reason, then what we have done today is wrong; but if we use the logic of Love, then we are right. For a man can become a woman and a woman a man. It is possible to go from life into death as well as from death into life. Those who are bound by the difference between man and woman or life and death have not lived love to the fullest. I have often said: "The sea may become dry, the mountains may erode, but Love alone cannot surrender to Reason!"<sup>88</sup>

This powerful enunciation of a romantic poetics offers me the chance of underlining—although in closing—what in the discussion of the social background, in the analysis of the moral vision these stories conceal, has perhaps been somewhat unjustly relegated. That is to say, these stories are romantic literature, in the sense that—as lapidary as they can often be—their objective is always to describe the elements of that complex science that is the erotic experience. And if, certainly, in a way *The Cut Sleeve* is a specialized monograph within the Encyclopedia of Love, on the other hand its stories are "fragments of the love discourse";<sup>89</sup> they work as parables, the meaning of which goes beyond the multiplicity of the sexual orientation.

I have reserved a special place in the title of this essay to the story of a dragon that in a stormy evening emerged from a pond, spotted an old peasant on his way home after a long day in the fields, and raped him.<sup>90</sup> Without question there would have been in that season many women going to the fields to bring food to their husbands, yet the dragon wanted a man; and there would have been no lack of shepherdboys either, yet the dragon fancied an old man; why?—the writer of the story, astonished, asks himself. There is no answer, and he probably knew it, when he wrote this surreal metaphor of the unscrutability of desire.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in McMahon, p. 74.

<sup>89</sup> Roland Barthes, *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977).

<sup>90</sup> *Long yin dianhu* 龍淫佃戶, DXP, pp. 17b–18a.

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# Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of *Qing* in Ming-Qing Literature<sup>1</sup>

Martin W. Huang  
University of California, Irvine

The special fascination with *qing* 情 exhibited in late Ming literature, or the so-called cult of *qing*, has been attracting increasing attention from students of Chinese literature.<sup>2</sup> However, to describe the precise implications of this late Ming concept of “*qing*,” a word that does not have an exact English equivalent but has been translated on various occasions as “feelings,” “love,” “romantic sentiments,” and “passions,” has proven to be very difficult.<sup>3</sup> Its popularity in the world of letters during the late Ming (1368-1644) only adds to its ambiguities. The more people appealed to this concept of *qing*, the more different implications it might yield. Ambiguities, in turn, added to the appeal of the concept. This essay is a preliminary attempt to explore some of the complicated implications of *qing* as it was conceived by literati writers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The main argument of this essay is that the cult of *qing* and the ambiguities associated with this concept are the consequences of a new attitude toward desire that emerged during that period as well as a result of the deliberate attempts at appropriation on the part of some disenfranchised literati struggling to (re)assert their elite status by reinventing themselves as the custodians of the genuine *ru* 儒 or Confucian cultural heritage.

<sup>1</sup>In this essay, “Ming-Qing literature” mainly refers to those works produced during the period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

<sup>2</sup>Among those studies that discuss the cult of *qing* at some length are Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Stories* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), esp., pp. 79-80 and 95-97; Wai-ye Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), Hua-yuan Li Mowry, *Chinese Love Stories from Ch'ing-shih* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1983), Kang-i Sun Chang, *The Late-Ming Poet Ch'en Tzu-lung: Crises in Love And Loyalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), and Pi-ching Hsu, “Celebrating the Emotional Self: Feng Meng-lung and Late Ming Ethics and Aesthetics” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1994). Anthony Yu’s important study *Rereading the Stone: Desire and the Making of Fiction in Dream of the Red Chamber* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) became available only after the draft of this paper was completed. However, I will refer to it whenever possible (my review of Yu’s book will appear in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*).

<sup>3</sup>For a list of possible meanings of *qing* as it was conceived in the history of Chinese poetry criticism, see Siu-kit Wong, “*Ch'ing* in Chinese Literary Criticism” (Ph.D. dissertation, Oxford University, 1969), pp. 328-334. Wong’s dissertation, though written almost thirty years ago, remains the only study that focuses on the development of the concept of *qing* in the history of traditional Chinese poetry criticism. A. C. Graham has gone so far as to claim that in pre-Han literature *qing* never means passions but refers to the “genuine” or the “defining essence” of man. See “Appendix: The Meaning of *ch'ing* 情” in “The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature,” in A.C. Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), pp. 59-66. Though agreeing with Graham’s explications of many specific cases of *qing*, Chad Hansen offers a critique of what he considers Graham’s “essentialist” approach, “*Qing* (Emotions) 情 in Pre-Buddhist Chinese Thought,” *Emotions in Asian Thought: A Dialogue in Comparative Philosophy*, ed. by Joel Marks and Roger T. Ames (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 181-211. See also Anthony Yu, *Rereading the Stone*, pp. 56-82.

### Historical Underpinnings

In traditional Chinese philosophical discourse, *qing* was often conceived in its relation to another important concept, *xing* 性 (one's inborn nature). One of the earliest definitions of *qing* was provided by Xunzi 荀子 (ca. 313-230 B.C.): "The feelings of liking and disliking, of delight and anger, and of sorrow and joy that are inborn in our nature are called 'emotions' [性之好，惡，喜，怒，哀，樂之情]." <sup>4</sup> It is probably accurate to say that in pre-Han texts (before 206 B.C.), *qing* and *xing* often overlap in meaning, although they are not completely synonymous with each other. This is why Mencius (ca. 372-289 B.C.) said: "If you allow people to follow their feelings [original nature], they will be able to do good [乃若其情，則可以為善矣]." <sup>5</sup> Here *qing* was understood as something basically similar to one's nature in the sense that it was the manifestation of *xing*. However, by the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.-24 A.D.), the differences between these two concepts began to receive more attention, and they were treated antithetically. Even more significantly, in this antithetical treatment *xing* was often said to be good while *qing* had negative connotations. <sup>6</sup> Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 179-104 B.C.) was probably one of the first to suggest such an antithesis between *xing* and *qing*. <sup>7</sup> This dualistic view later became much more explicit and categorical in Li Ao's 李翱 (ca. 772-841) *Fuxing shu* 復性書 (The Book on Restoring Nature):

That whereby a man may be a sage is his true nature; that whereby he may be deluded as to this nature is feeling. Joy, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hate, and desire—these seven are the workings of feeling. When the feelings have become darkened, the nature is hidden, but this is through no shortcoming of the nature: these seven follow

<sup>4</sup>Xunzi jijie 荀子集解 (Zhuzi jicheng 諸子集成 edition; rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1986), 22.274. English translation follows John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), vol. 3, p. 127.

<sup>5</sup>Mengzi 孟子, 6a.6 (Zhuzi jicheng ed., p. 443); English translation from Wing-tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 54. See, for example, the Qing philologist Yu Yue's 俞樾 (1822-1906) comment that "people of recent times make distinction between *xing* and *qing* while people of ancient times considered *qing* to be nothing else but *xing*," "Mengzi pingyi" 孟子平議, *Qunjing pingyi* 群經平議 (Taipei: Heluo tushu chubanshe, 1975), 2.21b (p. 2162).

<sup>6</sup>See He Qimin 何啟民, *Zhulin qixian yanjiu* 竹林七賢研究 (Taipei: Zhongguo xueshu jiangzhu weiyuanhui, 1966), pp. 92-94 and Mori Mikisaburô 森三木三郎, *Jôko yori Kandai ni itaru seimeikan no tenkai* 上古より漢代に至る生命の展開 (Tokyo: Sobunsha, 1971), pp. 63, 209-212, 226, 234-236. The reader is also referred to Anthony Yu's excellent discussions of the early history of *qing* in his *Rereading the Stone*, pp. 56-82, although my emphasis here is different.

<sup>7</sup>Dong Zhongshu was quoted by Wang Chong 王充 (ca. 27-ca. 100 A.D.) as saying that "... nature is born of *yang* and feelings are born of *yin*. The force of *yin* results in covetousness and that of *yang* results in benevolence. Those who say nature is good have insight about *yang* and those who say that nature is evil have insight about *yin*." "Benxing pian" 本性篇 (On Original Nature), *Lunheng* 論衡 (Balanced inquiries; Zhuzi jicheng ed.), p. 30; English translation (with modification) from Wing-tsit Chan, *Source Book*, p. 295. See also relevant discussions in Fung Yulan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), vol. 1, pp. 32-37. Anthony Yu observes that Dong Zhongshu set "the stage for legitimating the control of desire" (*Rereading the Stone*, p. 69).



one another in constant succession, so that nature cannot achieve its fullness.<sup>8</sup>

In Song Neo-Confucianism *qing* was mainly conceived in terms of the concepts of *weifa* 未發 (the state before being aroused) and *yifa* 已發 (the state after being aroused) in the book *Zhongyong* 中庸 (The Doctrine of the Mean; originally a chapter in *Liji* 禮記 or the *Book of Rites*), which, largely due to Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130-1200) efforts, has been known as one of the so-called Confucian *Four Books* (*Sishu* 四書) since the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279):

Before the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are aroused [*weifa*] it is called equilibrium [*zhong* 中]. When those feelings are aroused [*yifa*] and each and all attain due measure and degree [*zhongjie* 中節] it is called harmony [*he* 和]. Equilibrium is the great foundation of the world and harmony its universal path. When equilibrium and harmony are realized to the highest degree, heaven and earth will attain their proper order and all things will flourish.<sup>9</sup>

Based on this idea in *Zhongyong*, Zhu Xi offered a more elaborate view of *qing*:

Nature is the state before activity begins, the feelings are the state when activity has started, and the mind includes both of these states. For nature is the mind before it is aroused, while feelings are the mind after it is aroused, as is expressed in [Zhang Zai's 張載 (1020-1077)] saying, "The mind commands man's nature and feelings." Desire emanates from feelings. The mind is comparable to water, nature is comparable to the tranquillity of still water, feeling is comparable to the flow of the water, and desire is comparable to its waves. Just as there are good and bad waves, so there are good desires, such as when "I want humanity," and bad desires which rush out like wild and violent waves. When bad desires are substantial, they will destroy the Principle of Heaven, as water bursts a dam and damages everything. When Mencius said that "feelings enable people to do good," he meant that the correct feelings flow from our nature are originally all good.<sup>10</sup>

While nature (*xing*) was the state before being aroused (*weifa*) or tranquillity (*jing* 靜)

<sup>8</sup>Li Wengong 李文公集 (*Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 ed.), 1.1; English translation follows, with some modifications, that of T. H. Barrett, *Li Ao: Buddhist, Taoist, or Neo-Confucian?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 88. The traditional view is that Li Ao's dualistic theory was a result of Buddhist influence, a view Barrett tries to refute in his book. However, in more general terms, the fact that the rise of Buddhism during the period from the Han to the Tang (618-907) contributed to the formation of this negative attitude toward *qing* seems beyond doubt.

<sup>9</sup>*Zhongyong zhangju* 中庸章句, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 (1935; rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1987), p. 2; English translation from Wing-tsit Chan, *Source Book*, p. 98.

<sup>10</sup>*Zhuzi quanshu* 朱子全書 (*Siku quanshu* ed), 45.4; English translation from Wing-tsit Chan, *Source Book*, p. 631 (throughout this essay, all cases of romanization in Wade-Giles system that appear in quoted English translations are changed to *pinyin* for the sake of consistency); see also *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), vol. 1, *juan* 5, pp. 93-94. This view of Zhu Xi must have been inspired by Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1077). For Cheng Yi's view on *qing*, see *Yichuan wenji* 遺川語類, in *Er Cheng quanshu* 二程全書 (*Sibu beiyao* 四部備要 ed.), 4.1a; English translation in Wing-tsit Chan, *Source Book*, pp. 547-548.

and was what Zhu Xi considered to be the pure state of principle (*li* 理), the problem was how to achieve due measure (*zhongjie* 中節) in the state after being aroused (*yifa*) or the state of movements (*dong* 動). Thomas Metzger has called attention to the two realms as conceived by Neo-Confucianism: those of the “metaphysical” (*xing er shang* 形而上) and “the experiential” (*xing er xia* 形而下): while concepts such as *xing* (nature), *li* 理 (principle), *tian* 天 (heaven) and *jing* (tranquillity) belong to the metaphysical realm, *qi* 氣 (ether), *dong* (activity) and *qing* belong to the experiential realm.<sup>11</sup> Although Zhu Xi and probably many other Neo-Confucian thinkers never intended the distinction between the two realms to be rigorously dualistic, the implied view that evil only became possible in the experiential realm was unmistakable, suggesting a dyadic pattern of moral valorization (the former being absolutely good while the latter being sometimes capable of evil). Compared with Mencius, Zhu Xi’s view of *qing* was substantially more pessimistic, a fact well attested to by their different uses of the image of water. While Mencius asserted that “man’s nature is naturally good just as water naturally flows downward,” Zhu Xi often used the image of water to emphasize the possibility of *qing* becoming excessive: running water (*qing*) could become turbulent waves (*yu* 欲 or excessive desires) and overflow the dam, resulting in damage.<sup>12</sup> In other words, possibilities for evil began to rise as soon as there is *qing* (*yifa*). *Qing* was considered morally suspect. Consequently, the dichotomy between *xing* and *qing* (*xingshan qing’e* 性善情惡) established among some Han thinkers, was largely maintained in Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism and became only more sophisticated.<sup>13</sup>

However, beginning around the mid-Ming, some literati thinkers started to feel the need to revalorize *qing*. Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559) complained that historically, with few exceptions, little attention was paid to *qing*. He tried to come up with a more balanced view of *xing* and *qing*: “What will happen if one promotes *xing* but neglects *qing*? He will become dead ashes. What will happen if one is moved by *qing* but

<sup>11</sup> *Escape from Predicament: Neo-Confucianism and China’s Evolving Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 82-85.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Metzger, *Escape from Predicament*, p.114. My discussion here is indebted to Metzger’s analysis (pp. 49-165) of what he has called “the Neo-Confucian sense of predicament”—an almost unshakable faith in the “metaphysical” goodness and their constant anxiety over the potentiality of evil in the experiential realm.

<sup>13</sup> For Wang Yangming’s 王陽明 (1472-1529) cautious and equally negative view on *qing*, see *Chuanxi lu* 傳習錄, in *Wang Yangming quanji* 王陽明全集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1992), pp. 17, 65 and 111, and *Instructions for Practical Living and Other Confucian Writings by Wang Yang-ming*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp. 38-39, 138-139 and 228-229. What I have so far been trying to do is to establish a minimum context for my discussions of some of the new attitudes toward *qing* during the late Ming, while a full survey of the development of the concept of *qing* in the history of traditional Chinese philosophy is obviously beyond the scope of this essay. For other accounts of the concept of *qing* in Chinese intellectual history, see Zhang Dainian 張岱年, *Zhongguo zhexue dagang* 中國哲學大綱 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1985), pp. 467-479, Siu-kit Wong, pp. 288-308, and Pi-ching Hsu, pp. 6-15 and 98-131. Of course, Anthony Yu provides the most thorough discussion of the early history of *qing* to date in his *Rereading Stone*, pp. 56-109.

forgets about *xing*? He will become an animal.”<sup>14</sup> Yan Jun 顏鈞 (1504-1596), who was a member of the Taizhou school (the left-wing of the Neo-Confucian School of the Mind founded by Wang Yangming 王陽明 [1472-1529]), reportedly also lectured on *qing*.<sup>15</sup> Of course, what made this significant was the fact that Luo Rufang 羅汝芳 (1515-1588), another member of the Taizhou school, was Yan Jun’s disciple, while Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550-1616), the central figure in the cult of *qing* of the late Ming, happened to be Luo’s student. Tang Xianzu was believed to have gone so far as to claim that he wanted to talk about *qing* rather than *xing* when he was asked why a man with talents such as his had become involved with theater instead of becoming a philosopher/teacher.<sup>16</sup>

Compared with *qing*, the concept of *yu* 欲 (desire) is relatively less ambiguous, and the English word “desire” is generally an accurate equivalent. According to the “definition” in *Liji* 禮記 (the Book of Rites): “What is meant by human feelings? Pleasure, anger, sadness, fear, love, hate, desire, these seven men are capable of without having learned them,”<sup>17</sup> desire is only one of seven *qing*. Xunzi offered another way of examining the relationship between the two: “Nature is the consequences of Heaven; feelings are the substance of nature; desires are the response of feelings [性者，天之就也；情者，性之質也；欲者，情之應也。]”<sup>18</sup> These two examples show that *qing*, when broadly defined, contains the meaning of *yu* (desire).

However, there often is a subtle hierarchical pattern of moral valorization implied when these two concepts are juxtaposed. In Zhu Xi’s favorite metaphorical comparison, nature is compared to the tranquillity of still water, feelings to the flow of the water, and desires to the waves. It is, however, “violent” waves (*yu* or excessive desires) that will cause the water to overflow (bursting the dam and damaging everything, to use Zhu Xi’s words). The image of flooding was employed by Zhu Xi to drive home this point:

<sup>14</sup>“Xing qing lun,” 性情論, *Sheng’an ji* 升庵集 (*Siku quanshu* ed.), 5.13. Yang Shen has been appreciated mainly as a writer. However, his achievements as a thinker are also beginning to attract attention. See, for example, Lu Fuchu 陸復初, *Bei lishi yiwang de yidai zheren: lun Yang Sheng’an jiqi sixiang* 被歷史遺忘的一代哲人論揚升庵及其思想 (Kunming: Yun’nan renmin chubanshe, 1990). For a brief discussion of Yang Shen’s view of *qing* in poetry criticism, see Siu-kit Wong, pp. 159-162.

<sup>15</sup>“Taizhou xue’an” 泰州學案, Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610-1695), *Mingru xue’an* 明儒學案, in *Huang Zongxi quanji* 黃宗羲全集 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji, 1985), vol. 1, p. 822.

<sup>16</sup>As quoted in Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558-1639), “*Mudan ting tici*,” 牡丹亭題詞 *Tang Xianzu yanjiu ziliao huibian* 湯顯祖研究資料匯編, comp., Mao Xiaotong 毛效同 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1986), vol. 2, p. 855. This remark seems to have caught the attention of many Ming-Qing writers such as Huang Zongxi and Zhou Lianggong 周亮工 (1612-1672), *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 676 and 875.

<sup>17</sup>“Liyun” 禮運, *Liji zhuzi suoyin* 禮記逐字索引 (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1992), p. 62; English translation from *Li Chi: Book of Rites*, trans. James Legge (Rpt. New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1967), vol. 1, p. 379.

<sup>18</sup>Xunzi, 22.284; cf. Knoblock’s translation (p. 136), “‘Inborn nature’ is the consequence of Heaven. ‘Emotions’ are the substance of that nature. ‘Desires’ [are the resources of nature]. [‘Seeking’ what is desired] is the response of the emotions.” Knoblock notes (p. 344, n. 100, 101) that the word *qing* is used by Xunzi in the dual sense of “emotional nature” and “essential nature” and the words in parentheses are the result of his own reconstruction of the original text that is corrupt.

The mind is water; nature is the principle of the water. Nature is maintained because the water is still; feelings begin to flow due to the movement of the water; desires are the flow of the water that begins to flood [*lan* 濫].<sup>19</sup>

Compared with *qing*, *yu* is even more “active” and even further “distant” from *xing* (which is supposed to be absolutely tranquil and good), and therefore, more dangerous.

Even though Zhu Xi and others never explicitly condemned desires per se as evil, the absolute incompatibility between the Heavenly Principle (*tianli* 天理) and human desire (*renyu* 人欲) so much emphasized by many Neo-Confucian thinkers did add to the perception of desire being morally suspect.<sup>20</sup> This antithetical treatment of *tianli* and *renyu* received even more emphasis in the writings by some Ming Neo-Confucian thinkers including Wang Yangming, despite the fact that Wang’s theory of human subjectivity played an important role in the subsequent rise of the cult of *qing*.<sup>21</sup> The early Ming Neo-Confucian thinker Liu Ji’s 劉基 (1311-1375) fear of *yu* and *qing* almost reached the level of despair:

*Qi* (ether) is the poison of the *Dao*, while *qing* is the knife blade of *xing* (nature). What makes them become poison and knife blade is *yu* (desire). Alas! Heaven and man are the essence of the universe but they have to be under the control of *yu* so that *qi* and *qing* can have their way while *xing* and the *Dao* have to follow them. There is nothing one can do about this fact since this is the intention of the Creator.<sup>22</sup>

Consequently, by the time of the Ming, the word *yu* or *renyu* had been used so frequently in disparaging contexts that its “rehabilitation” became rather difficult even when some people began to feel the need to revalorize the phenomenon of desire.

If there were indeed any success toward such a rehabilitation of this sort, it was very limited and appeared to have been confined largely to abstract philosophical discourses. Luo Qinchun 羅欽順 (1465-1547) was probably one of the first Ming

<sup>19</sup>Zhuji yulei, vol. 1, juan 5, p. 97.

<sup>20</sup>Zhu Xi’s concept of “human desire,” as many have pointed out, only refers to “selfish desires,” which needs to be exterminated, rather than desire per se, implying that there are “desires” which are in accordance with Heavenly Principle. See, for example, Qian Mu 錢穆, *Zhuji xin xue’an* 朱子新學案 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1986), 2.10, pp. 280-288, and Wang Yuji 王育濟, *Tianli yu renyu* 天理人欲 (Ji’nan: Qilu shushe, 1992), pp. 135-139. However, the specific choice of the word “human desire” (to pair with “heavenly principle”) might be misleading to many, giving people the impression that Zhu Xi is condemning desire absolutely. This impression was probably one of the reasons behind the repressive attitudes toward desire that became dominant during many periods in post-Song China when the Song Neo-Confucian ideology received rigid interpretations under the sponsorship of the imperial government.

<sup>21</sup>Despite his many differences from Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming’s view on the relationship between *tianli* and *renyu* was surprisingly similar to that of the former. See Wang Yuji, pp. 182-193; Wang Yuji’s study provides a convenient but relatively detailed survey of the development of the concept of *yu* in Chinese intellectual history, although his indiscriminate treatment of the different use of the concept of *li* (before and after the Song Neo-Confucianism) may be a cause for concern.

<sup>22</sup>This remark is presented through the voice of the persona Yulizi 郁離子 in Liu Ji’s fictional allegory, which is titled after the name of this character; see “Tiandao” 天道, Yulizi 郁離子, *Chengyi bo wenji* 誠意伯文集 (Siku quanshu ed.), 18.42.

Confucian thinkers who found the Song Neo-Confucian dualistic approach to *li* and *yu* problematic enough to warrant a revalorization:

The fact that man has desires definitely derives from heaven. Some are necessary and cannot be repressed; some are appropriate and cannot be changed. If those that are irrepressible all conform to the principle of what is appropriate, how can they not be good? It is only heedlessly giving way to passions, indulging the desires, and not knowing how to turn back that is evil. Confucians of the past often spoke about eliminating or restraining human desires and thought it necessary to resort to severe means in order to repress them. But their mode of expression seems one-sided and exaggerated. The desires, together with pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy, are qualities of nature. Can pleasure, sorrow, anger and joy also be eliminated?<sup>23</sup>

The most eloquent advocate for reevaluating the status of desire was probably the late Ming and early Qing literati thinker Chen Que 陳確 (1604-1677). Chen was worried that “if the distinctions between heavenly principle and human desires are stressed too much, the latter would have no place to hide. This will do harm to one’s mind and body.”<sup>24</sup> He wrote:

Desires for food and sex all originate from righteousness and principle while longings for examination success, fame, wealth, and rank are motivated by one’s moral virtue. As I said before, originally there was no heavenly principle in one’s mind; heavenly principle is only perceptible through human desires [人心本無天理，天理正從人欲中見]. Human desires, when proper, become heavenly principle. Without human desires, there would be no heavenly principle to talk about.... Desires are the intent arising from one’s mind. They are the origins of all virtue. When talking about desires, one can only ask whether they are excessive but one should never ask whether they are something that one should have or something that one should not have.<sup>25</sup>

Given the Neo-Confucian propensity to distrust anything that was in the state after being aroused (*yifa*), Chen Que had perhaps reached the limits within which a Confucian thinker could justify human desires. However, even Chen Que had to admit that the difference between an ordinary person and a sage was that the latter did not indulge

<sup>23</sup> *Kunzhi ji* 困知記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), *juan xia* 卷下, item 14, p. 28. English translation from *Knowledge Painfully Acquired: The K'un-chih chi by Lo Ch'in-shun*, trans. and ed. Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 121. Cf. Bloom’s (p. 20) comment: “One of the corollaries of Luo’s denial of the notion of two natures, an original nature and a physical nature, was his rejection of the idea, basic to the psychological thought of the most of the Song Neo-Confucians, that there was a fundamental antagonism between the Principle of Nature (*tianli*) and the human desires (*renyu*). . . . Human desires, in Luo’s view, are, like the emotions, signs and expressions of human nature. They are natural and in conformity with principle. What requires control and regulation is the extremity of “selfishness” per se, the lack of awareness that one is fundamentally like others and has the same disposition and needs.” For Luo’s contemporary, Wu Tinghan’s 吳庭翰 (ca. 1470-1559) similar view, see his *jizhai manlu* 吉齋漫錄, in *Wu Tinghan ji* 吳庭翰集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), p. 66.

<sup>24</sup> “Guyan yi” 瞽言一, *Chen Que ji* 陳確集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), p. 424.

<sup>25</sup> “Wuyu zuo sheng bian” 無欲作聖辨, *Chen Que ji*, p. 461.

in desires, which was still something one should be vigilant against.<sup>26</sup>

However, despite their best efforts, the word *yu* or *renyu* had been used derogatorily for so long that an effective rehabilitation of its “name” appeared to be virtually impossible. On the other hand, *qing*, as a broader as well as a more ambiguous concept, offered itself as a very convenient alternative term for those literati writers who were seriously reexamining the implications of desire (including those more “primitive aspects”). An important strategy was to *sentimentalize* desires, emphasizing what they considered to be the elements of *qing* in *yu*. Of course, their preference for the word *qing* was not entirely a choice by default or due to the negative associations of the word *yu*. In other words, this was much more than a rhetorical tactic. With all its close associations with *xing* (especially as conceived in various pre-Han classics), *qing* could always be presented, if necessary, as something worthy of celebration rather than merely requiring constant apology as in the case of *yu*. A related fact is that despite the strong suspicions about *qing* in general philosophical discourse in imperial China (roughly from the Han to the Ming dynasties; of course, there were significant exceptions), the fate of *qing* appeared to have been rather different in the domain of literature, especially in poetry and poetry criticism. Ever since Lu Ji’s 陸機 (261-303) path-breaking redefinition of *shi* 詩 (poetry) as *shi yuanqing* 詩緣情 (poems follows from feelings),<sup>27</sup> *qing* had almost always been considered an important, positive element in writing and reading poetry despite possible controversies over its specific implications.<sup>28</sup> What some of the late Ming writers actually did in this cult of *qing*

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 461. For discussions of this Ming-Qing trend to revalorize desire, see Wang Yuji, pp. 194-431, and Chung-ying Cheng, “Reason, Substance, and Human Desires in Seventeenth-Century Neo-Confucianism,” *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), pp. 469-509.

<sup>27</sup>Lu Ji’s use of *qing* to substitute *zhi* 志 (intention) in the canonical definition of poetry—*shi yan zhi* 詩言志 (poetry expresses what is intended in the mind), as formulated in *Shujing* 書經 and in the “Great Preface” to *Shijing* 詩經, has been considered to be a watershed in the history of the development of Chinese poetry criticism. For a detailed discussion and English translation of Lu Ji’s *Wenfu* 文賦 (The Poetic Exposition on Literature), see Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992), pp. 73-181, esp. 130-131. Cf. Siu-kit Wong’s observation (p. 29): “It is in this period that the meaning of the word [*qing*] first becomes more or less clearly defined and can be fairly safely translated as ‘emotion’ . . . There was also a narrowing down of the range of *qing* to the more private kind of emotion.” The concept of *qing* also figures prominently in Liu Xie’s 劉勰 (ca. 465-520) *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 (The Literary Mind and the Craft of Carving Dragons), although, for Liu Xie, *qing* was still a very broad concept (see Wong’s discussions, pp. 32-43). The fact that *qing* is valorized differently in philosophy and literature is perhaps best attested by Liu Xie, who, according to some scholars, was also the author of *Liuzi* 劉子. In that text Liu Xie is surprisingly negative about *qing*: “Inborn nature (*xing*) and feelings (*qing*) are integral to man, who is endowed with ether (*qi* 氣). What inborn nature responds to is feelings; what feelings try to satisfy is desires (*yu* 欲). Feelings originate from inborn nature and yet feelings also run against inborn nature; desires originate from feelings and yet desires also harm feelings.” See “Fangyu di’er” 防欲第二, *Liuzi jijiao* 劉子集成, ed. Lin Qitan 林其鏐 and Chen Fengjin 陳鳳金 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1985), p. 6. Lin and Chen (p. 1-23) argue for the attribution of this text to Liu Xie. For a view that disputes this attribution, see Yang Mingzhao 楊明照, *Liuzi jiaozhu* 劉子校注 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1988), pp. 1-25. Siu-kit Wong (pp. 119-220) notes a somewhat similar, though not so extreme, case of ambivalence toward *qing* in Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-1692).

<sup>28</sup>Siu-kit Wong (pp. 77-80) characterizes the status of *qing* in the Song-Yuan period (from the tenth to the fourteenth century) as that of “survival”: Though still in circulation, *qing* as a critical term was often substituted by the word *yi* 意 and *qing* “occupied a less important place in Sung criticism than in that of

movement was to make *qing* into a central issue in fiction and drama by promoting it as a supreme human value worthy of celebration. By virtue of their unique mimetic capacity, fiction and drama, as literary genres that were supposed to cater to the tastes of audiences from a much wider social spectrum, seemed to have compelled the representations of *qing* to become more “sensuous” as well as more “earthy.” This “prosaic” approach seems to have sensualized (*yuhua* 欲化) and secularized *qing* (for instance, *qing* was presented more often as sexual love between man and woman, instead of, say, a literati poet’s aesthetic response to a magnificent landscape as in a lyrical poem),<sup>29</sup> and thus making it more vulnerable to censoring pressures from conservative moralists. An interesting resultant phenomenon is the blurring of the distinctions between *qing* and *yu*: while physical desire was being sentimentalized, romantic sentiments were also being sensualized.

With more and more writers claiming allegiance to the concept of *qing*, many “moralists” felt compelled to attack this concept of *qing* due to its increased visibility. To counter the pressure of criticism, the *qing* advocates had to be more emphatic as well as more articulate in espousing the values of *qing*. Such self-conscious and emphatic efforts, in turn, helped to raise further the status of *qing* among many literati during the late Ming.

#### *The Late Ming Appropriations of Qing*

The relationship between some literati’s personal experiences as “disenfranchised” members of the elite and their unprecedented enthusiasm for *qing* is worth a close look here. Some of them could be very “personal” and worshipped *qing* with a fervor that was almost religious. Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646) is a case in point. In a preface to his *Qingshi* 情史 (A History of Love), which is a large collection of stories about *qing*, Feng Menglong writes:

It has always been my ambition to write a history of *qing*, and ever since I was a young man, I have prided myself on being a *qing* fanatic. Among my friends I always bare my soul, sharing with them in times both good and bad. . . . Whenever I meet a person rich in emotion [*youqing ren* 有情人], I always want to show my respects to him and whenever I see a person who lacks emotion [*wuqing ren* 無情人] and whose views do not agree with mine, I always try to patiently guide him with *qing*. I only give up when that person absolutely refuses to listen. I have said in jest before that I would become a Buddha to deliver the world after I die because I cannot forget my love for the people of this world [*buneng wangqing shiren* 不能忘情世人]. And I would

either the preceding periods or that of Ming and Ch’ing.” And Wong seems to attribute this at least partly to the influence of the Song Neo-Confucian philosophers. For discussions of the status of *qing* in Ming poetry criticism and especially the relevant views of the so-called “Former Seven Masters” see Wong, pp. 136-194 (esp. pp. 144-162). His discussion should help us to conclude that well before the rise of the cult in the late Ming, *qing* as a critical concept had already received ample attention in mid-Ming poetry criticism; see also Liao Kebin’s 廖可斌 discussions in his recent *Mingdai wenxue fugu yundong yanjiu* 明代文學復古運動研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1994), pp. 90-105 and 247-250.

<sup>29</sup>For example, Wang Fuzhi insisted that “poetry should express *qing* (feelings) but not *yu* (desires).” See “Lun Beimen” 論北門, in “Beifeng” 邶風, *Shi guangzhuan* 詩廣傳, juan 1, *Chuanshan quanshu* 船山全書

come to this world under the title "Buddha of boundless love and joys."<sup>30</sup>

The reader must be struck by the intense personal tone here as if the author of the preface had a lot of personal interest invested in this project on *qing*, which was supposedly about many other people's *qing*. Indeed, this book that documented others' *qing* may have meant much more to its author himself than just a hobby of collecting anecdotes about love. That Feng Menglong was a person rich in emotion (*youqing ren*) can best be seen in his outpouring of emotions after his love affair with the courtesan Hou Huiqing 侯慧卿 broke off.<sup>31</sup> Although romancing courtesans was usually considered part of the life style of romantic literati during that time, it probably meant much more than just being "romantic" for someone like Feng Menglong. As we know, Feng Menglong received his licentiate (*xiucai* 秀才) degree in his twenties. Not until several decades later was he, as a fifty-six-year old stipendiary student (*gongsheng* 貢生), offered the position of assistant county instructor; four years later he was appointed, at the advanced age of sixty, magistrate in a remote county, an official position of the seventh grade (*qipin* 七品).<sup>32</sup> These facts tell us at least two things: Feng had a very frustrating career; and he was always interested in public service (he was still willing to serve as a lowly seventh-grade official at the age of sixty). It was not unusual for those frustrated in their career to seek solace in the arms of a courtesan. There must be something shared by courtesans and frustrated literati that made the former especially appealing to the latter. Here Fu Shan's 傅山 (1607-1684) observation should be helpful: "A famous courtesan who has been forced into prostitution is not different from a romantic scholar who has suffered many frustrations in career in the sense that they both fail to fulfill their life-long ambitions."<sup>33</sup> Indeed, after numerous setbacks in his career, Feng must have found appealing the alternative of the career of a writer promoting *qing* as a way to vindicate his own unrecognized talents. In fact, for a

(Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1992), vol. 3, p. 325.

<sup>30</sup>"*Qingshi xu*" 情史敘 (written under the name of Long Ziyong 龍子猶), *Qingshi* 情史, 1a-2a, *Feng Menglong quanji* 馮夢龍全集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1993), vol. 37, pp.1-3. For a complete translation of this preface, see Mowry, *Chinese Love Stories*, pp. 12-14.

<sup>31</sup>For a discussion of this romantic affair, see Wang Ling 王凌, "Feng Menglong yu Hou Huiqing" 馮夢龍與侯慧卿, in *idem*, *Qiren, qingzhong, qipin guan* 畸人情種七品官 (Fuzhou: Haixia wenyi chubanshe, 1992), pp. 23-28. For discussions of the relationship between courtesans and literati in the seventeenth century, see Kang-i Sun Chang, *The Late-Ming Poet Ch'en Tzu-lung*, pp. 9-18 and Wai-ye Li, "The Late-Ming Courtesan: Invention of a Cultural Ideal," *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 46-73. Chang (p. 12) goes so far as to claim that the late Ming "cult of love was largely a product of the courtesan culture."

<sup>32</sup>For information on Feng's life, see Wang Lin, "Feng Menglong shengping jianbian" 馮夢龍生平簡編, in *idem*, *Qiren, qingzhong, qipin guan*, pp. 115-139, Xu Shuofang 徐朔方, "Feng Menglong nianpu" 馮夢龍年譜, in *Xu Shuofang ji* 徐朔方集 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji, 1994), pp. 393-452, and Yuan-hua Li Mowry, "Ch'ing-shih and Feng Meng-lung" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1976), pp. 441-448. Xu Shuofang (p. 432) believes that Feng assumed the position of the magistrate of the Shouning county at the age of sixty-one rather than sixty.

<sup>33</sup>Li Zhongfu 李中馥, "Liancai hauju" 憐才聚舉, *Yuan Li erzai* 原李耳載, in Wang Wenru 王文濡, comp. *Shuoku* 說庫 (Shanghai, 1915; rpt. Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji, 1986), vol. 2, p. 7



group of frustrated literati, pursuing *qing* in life (i.e., romancing courtesans) and, more significantly, practicing or writing about *qing* became a special means of “compensation” when they suffered career setbacks.<sup>34</sup> The late Ming writer Wei Yong 衛泳 (fl. seventeenth century) is very straightforward in depicting such a therapeutic function of *qing*:

*Qing* is that for which the living could die and because of which the dead could be resurrected. This is why filial sons, men of righteousness and chaste women are all people rich in *qing* (*youqing ren*). When a man cannot find anyone to appreciate his talent and when he cannot find any opportunity to fulfill his genuine desire (*zhenqing* 真情) of seeking glory and success in public service, he will seek compensation in love for a pretty woman.<sup>35</sup>

Obviously this was a view shared by Feng Menglong, who defended vehemently the poet Liu Yong 柳永 (ca. 987-1053), known for his romantic involvement with prostitutes. In the twelfth story in Feng Menglong's *Gujin xiaoshuo* 古今小說 (Stories Old and New), Liu Yong is presented as a poet of many talents; he loses an opportunity for career success, we are told, only because one of his poems does not happen to please the emperor. In a note in the story, Feng goes out of his way to point out that many of the literati who have romanced prostitutes turn out to be great heroes, emphasizing that a person of *qing* is capable of heroic actions and that *qing* and heroic actions are by no means mutually exclusive.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, indulgence in *qing* and *haose* 好色 (love for pretty women) were even considered by some to be deliberate acts of “withdrawal from public life,” which were referred to with the specially-coined phrase

<sup>34</sup>Interpreted in terms of this relationship between a literatus's obsession with *qing* and his career setbacks, the fact that Tang Xianzu wrote his famous play *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭 (The Peony Pavilion) just after he was forced to quit the bureaucratic world should not be considered merely a coincidence. For an account of Tang's life and the dating of *Mudan ting*, see Xu Shuofang, “Tang Xianzu nianpu” 湯顯祖年譜 and “Yuming tang chuanqi chuanguo niandai kao” 玉茗堂傳奇創作年代考, in *Xu Shuofang ji*, vol. 4, pp. 201-469 and 484-488. There were many late Ming literati/officials who turned to writings plays after being forced to resign from their official posts. Li Kaixian 李開先 (1502-1568) is another example; for a discussion of his life and literary works, see Bu Jian 卜健, *Li Kaixian zhuanlue* 李開先傳略 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1989). Of course, many seventeenth-century writers of *caizi jiaren xiaoshuo* 才子佳人小說 (fiction of scholars and beauties), where *qing* as romantic sentiments was also highly valorized, were often those marginalized literati who had frustrated careers. See, for example, Yanshui sanren's 煙水散人 preface to the early Qing collection of short stories *Nücaizi shu* 女才子書 (A Book of Female Talents; Shenyang, Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe, 1983), pp. 1-3 and Tianhuazang zhuren's 天花藏主人 preface to the early novel *Pingshan Lengyan* 平山冷燕 (Flat Mountain and Cold Swallow; Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe, 1982), pp. 232-233.

<sup>35</sup>Wei Yong 衛泳, *Yuerong bian* 悅容編, in *Zhaodai congshu* 昭代叢書, ed. Zhang Chao 張潮 (1659-1707) et. al (rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1991) vol. 4, p. 3301.

<sup>36</sup>*Gujin xiaoshuo*, *Feng Menglong quanji*, vol. 12, 12.12b (p. 476); see Hanan's discussion in his *Chinese Vernacular Stories*, pp. 115-116; My discussion of Feng's concept of *qing* here is indebted to Hanan's observations (esp., pp. 75-97). Note also Zhou Quan's 周銓 (ca. 1600) remarks in his “Yingxiong qiduan shuo” 英雄氣短說 referred to by Hanan (p. 221 n. 13): “I think what makes heroes is that they have love in greater measure than others and are capable of greater devotions to something, with their heart and soul in it. . . . When the country called, they responded. There is no mystery about it. They had a big heart, and merely transferred that great love from one thing to something else. Therefore, as I say, love is not confined to any one thing. Only those who make some great sacrifice can love truly;” translation in Lin Yutang, *The Importance of Understanding* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1960), pp. 117-118.

*seyin* 色隱 (withdrawal into the arms of pretty women). Disgusted with the world of men, a real hero turned to a beautiful woman for appreciation (*zhiji* 知己). Thus *seyin* could be a self-conscious act of political protest and as well as self-vindication on the part of a frustrated literatus, while such an act was often defended or promoted by appealing to the concept of *qing*.<sup>37</sup>

Another concept highly valorized by those who advocated *qing* during the late Ming was *zhen* 真 (the genuine or authentic) as captured in the phrase “genuine feelings” (*zhenqing*).<sup>38</sup> The most vocal as well as eloquent advocate for the *genuine* was of course the famous radical thinker Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602), whose impact on the cult of *qing* movement was substantial, although Li himself did not say much on the concept of *qing* per se.<sup>39</sup> To a large extent, Li Zhi’s enthusiastic championing of “genuineness” and “authenticity” seemed to have been a reaction against what he perceived to be a fashion of “falsehood” and “hypocrisy” (*jia* 假) prevalent in contemporary literati circles. As a matter of fact, Li Zhi’s influential essay “On the Child-like Mind” (*tongxin shuo* 童心說) was largely an indictment of such falsehood and hypocrisy.<sup>40</sup> Of course, what is implied in such a critique is that people like Li Zhi who took upon themselves the task of combating this fashion of hypocrisy and that it was these “few” that were still able to retain their genuine child-like minds. This sense of being a “child-like minority” is more discernible in Li Zhi’s direct praise of the genuine:

There are “genuine people” [*zhenren* 真人] because there is genuine Buddha; the fact that there is genuine Buddha becomes known because there are genuine people; genuine people are naturally loved because there is genuine Buddha. Only the genuine can recognize what is genuine; only the genuine will make what is genuine even more genuine; and only the genuine will think of what is genuine.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Wei Yong, “Zhaoyin” 招隱, *Yue’rong bian*, p. 3303. This view was shared by You Tong 尤侗 (1618-1704) who believed that “frustrated men of talents seek solace in pursuits of sensual pleasures [聲色者才人之寄旅];” see his preface to Li Yu’s 李漁 (1611-1680) *Xianqing ouji* 閒情偶記: “Xu” 序, *Li Yu quanji* 李漁全集 (Hongzhou: Zhejiang guji, 1992), vol. 3, p. 1. Similar views can also be found in some of the late Ming and early Qing erotic novels: see, for example, the postscript (*ba* 跋) to *Langshi* 浪史 (A History of Debauchery) written by the commentator Youxuanzi 又玄子 (see *Langshi* published in the *Siwuxie huibao* 思無邪匯寶 series by Taiwan Daying baike gufen youxian gongsi [Taipei, 1995], p. 271), where the libertine male protagonist is praised as a literati hero (*yingxiong* 英雄) who, however, turns away from public life due to the rule by the Mongols, and who as a great lover (*qiangu qingren* 千古情人) seeks comfort in love and romance. Since many works of Ming-Qing erotic fiction printed in this *Siwuxie huibao* series are carefully collated (with useful information on their textual histories) and are easily available, I will refer to the editions from this series whenever possible in this essay.

<sup>38</sup>For a discussion of the related concept of “spontaneity” in late Ming literature, see Wai-ye Li’s essay “The Rhetoric of Spontaneity in Late Ming Literature,” *Ming Studies*, 35 (August, 1995), pp. 32-52.

<sup>39</sup>The short essay “Dulü fushuo” 讀律膚說 is probably one of the few places where Li Zhi discourses on *qing* directly (here he discusses the intimate relationship between *ziran* 自然 or “naturalness” and *xingqin* 性情; see *Fenshu* 焚書, in *Fenshu*, *Xu Fenshu* 焚書續焚書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), pp. 132-133.

<sup>40</sup>See “Tongxin shuo,” Li Zhi, *Fengshu*, *Xu Fengshu*, p. 99; English translation can be found in de Bary, “Individualism and Humanitarianism,” p. 195.

<sup>41</sup>“San dashi xiang yi” 三大士像議, in *idem.*, *Fenshu*, *Xu Fenshu*, pp. 146-147.

The calculated repetitious rhetoric here creates an aura of elitism that deliberately excludes—not many people could be recognized as “genuine.” Ironically enough, this exclusionary agenda of self-vindication was often carried out in the name of “inclusion”: the so-called folk song movement in the late Ming could be considered such an “inclusive” effort—to include folk literature into what could be appreciated and imitated by the literati authors so that their own literature could be revitalized.

Many late Ming literati turned to folk songs or other forms of popular literature as a means to find and to preserve the literary works of “genuine feelings.” Arguing that the tradition of folk songs could be traced to the Confucian canon—*Shijing* 詩經 (The Book of Poetry), which was supposed to contain ancient folk songs, Li Kaixian 李開先 (1502-1568) declared that true poetry could only be found among common people (*zhenshi zai minjian* 真詩在民間),<sup>42</sup> a view shared by Feng Menglong.<sup>43</sup> By insisting that “genuineness” could only be found in literary genres outside the realm of contemporary literati culture, and more importantly, by suggesting that only people like himself could live up to the task of preserving such genuineness, Feng Menglong and his like-minded peers were actually claiming that they were the sole saviors of the literati culture by ridding it of falsehood. Popular literature, together with concepts such as “genuine feelings,” were appropriated by these disenfranchised literati as a means to reassert their elite status as *shi* 士.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, for *qing* advocates like Feng Menglong, *qing* could be as valuable as a deed of “cultural immortality,” something every aspiring literatus was supposed to pursue. In addition to the three commonly-accepted kinds of cultural immortality (*san buxiu* 三不朽), namely, achievements in moral self-cultivation, in public service, and in writing (*lide ligong liyan* 立德立功立言), Feng Menglong insisted that achievement in *qing* should be considered a fourth.<sup>45</sup>

In fact, the strategy of using the pursuit of *qing* as a means to carve out a relatively advantageous position in a hostile environment could be traced back to the Wei-Jin period (220-420) when many literati, persecuted and alienated, turned to various gestures of *qing* and *zhen* for self-vindication (*shuaixing renqing* 率性任情). Here we need to return briefly to the early history of *qing*. As we have previously observed, the dichotomy between *qing* and *xing* (one’s inborn nature) began to appear in Han philosophical discourse. By the time of the Wei-Jin period, with this dichotomy firmly established, *qing* was more often used as a narrower concept denoting specific “emotions” rather than other general manifestations of inborn nature, while *yu* (desire)

<sup>42</sup>“*Shijing yanci xu*” 市井艷詞序, *Li Kaixian ji* 李開先集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), vol. 1, p. 321.

<sup>43</sup>See his “*Xu Shan’ge*” 敘山歌, *Gua Zhi’er Shan’ge*, in *Feng Menglong quanji*, vol. 42, 1b-2b (pp. 2-4);

<sup>44</sup>See Katherine Carlitz’s discussions of the relationship between the late Ming cult of *qing* and literati appropriation of vernacular genres in her “Style and Suffering in Two Stories by ‘Langxian,’” in *Culture and State in Chinese History*, Theodore Hutters, R. Bin Wong and Pauline Yu, eds. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 211-213; and in her review of Kang-i Sun Chang’s book *The Late-Ming Poet Ch’ên Tzu-lung*, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 35.1 (1995), p. 226, 228-231.

<sup>45</sup>“*Qingxian qu xu*” 情仙曲序, *Daxia xinzeu* 大霞新奏, *Feng Menglong quanji*, vol. 37, 1.19a (p. 41).

began to be perceived as something in opposition to—rather than being included in—*qing* as defined in the *Book of Rites* (where desire is identified as one of the seven *qing*).<sup>46</sup> This “purification” stemmed in part from the need of some literati to defend the value of *qing* against the view that *xing* was good while *qing* evil. The purification of *qing* by those “romantic” literati during the Wei-Jin period (disassociating it from *yu*, which would later come to mean “excessive desire” or lust) was perhaps one of the reasons why *qing* as a concept was able to be defended and even cherished by generations of literati writers in face of the strong suspicions on the part of those conservative moralists. For some disenfranchised literati, the pursuit of the romantic concept of *qing* became a desperate gesture of defiance and independence. However, one thing that makes the late Ming cult of *qing* very different from the case in the Wei-Jin period is the fact that it was no longer possible to maintain the “aesthetic purity” of *qing* during a time such as the late Ming when the boundaries of various phenomena became so unstable (such as those between romantic sentiments and physical desires, as we will see in our discussion of some of the erotic novels).<sup>47</sup> For example, the above-mentioned concept of *shuaixing* 率性, which could probably be traced to the phrase “To follow our nature is called the Way 率性謂之道” in the Confucian classic *Zhongyong*,<sup>48</sup> was often used during the Wei-Jin period to describe someone who acted “naturally.” This term again became very popular during the late Ming. Acting naturally now, however, often meant seeking sexual fulfillment unaffectedly. Some of the

<sup>46</sup> In their efforts to defend the value of *qing* against the view that *xing* was good while *qing* was evil, some literati tried to “purify” *qing* by disassociating it from *yu*. Ji Kang 嵇康 (223-262) wrote: “When we speak of the ‘Gentlemen’ we mean someone whose mind is unconcerned with right and wrong, whose actions are not opposed to the Way. How can I explain this? One whose breath is tranquil and spirit empty has a mind which does not dwell on arrogance and self-praise; one whose substance is pure and mind penetrating has feelings [*qing*] which are not attached to what he desires [*yu*].” See Ji Kang, “Shi si lun” 釋私論, *Ji Kang jizhu* 嵇康集注, ed. Dai Mingyang 戴明揚 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1962), p. 234; translation modified from that in *Philosophy and Argumentation in Third-Century China: The Essays of Hsi Kang*, trans. & anno. Robert G. Henricks (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 107-108 (cf. Siu-kit Wong’s reading of this passage, p. 302). The kind of romantic life style pursued by those Wei-Jin literati had very little to do with sex. Their *qing* was “aesthetic” sentiments rather than anything close to “sexual desire,” a different phenomenon from the case of the cult of *qing* in the late Ming and early Qing as we will discuss. For a discussion of these “aesthetic” aspects of the Wei-Jin literati (whom he calls “sentimentalists”), see Fung Yulan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Derk Bodde (New York: Macmillan, 1948), pp. 231-240. Wai-yee Li (*Enchantment and Disenchantment*, p. 51) considers the Wei-Jin period to be “the age that first discovered the burden of self-conscious passion.”

<sup>47</sup> Another main difference between late Ming literati and their Wei-Jin predecessors is their changing social status: forced out of governmental office, most Wei-Jin literati could still claim illustrative pedigrees to help sustain their sense of belonging to the elite. But many late Ming literati, especially those low examination degree holders, because of the much expanded population of the educated and the much more “plebeian” nature of Ming society, found themselves having to face the much bigger danger of being excluded from the *shidafu* 士大夫 (scholar/official) circle. They had to fight much harder in order to be “insiders of the cultural elite.” Moreover, compared with their Wei-Jin predecessors, the percentage of Ming literati involved in politics was much smaller. Consequently, action such as “withdrawal from public life” was taken much less seriously, and, therefore, became less effective as a means of political protest or self-vindication (this was probably why people like Wei Yong had to reinvent “withdrawal” in terms of the ingenious concept of *seyin* to accommodate the new political and social reality of the late Ming). In general, a majority of late Ming literati tended to be less political and more “pragmatic.” All this affected the way *qing* was pursued during the late Ming.

<sup>48</sup> *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, p. 1; Wing-tsit Chan, *Source Book*, p. 98.

commentaries (attributed to Ye Zhou 葉晝 [fl. 1573-1619]) on the famous novel *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (Water Margin) are excellent examples:

Dwarf Wang [王矮虎] is after all a sage who is dictated by his own *xing* (nature). He loves pretty women [*hao se* 好色] and he never tries to pretend otherwise. Even when it comes down to matters of life and death, he still acts according to his own nature (*shuaiqixing* 率其性). If this happens to a so-called puritan [*dao xue xiansheng* 道學先生], he will surely try to cover himself up with all kinds of hypocritical deeds.<sup>49</sup>

Despite his notoriety for his “aggressive sexual appetite,” Dwarf Wang nevertheless received enthusiastic praise from the commentators presumably because of his unaffected style. Admiration for “authenticity” and “genuineness” is a familiar theme in comments found in various late Ming commentary editions of *Shuihu zhuan*, many of which were published under the name of Li Zhi, whose idea of “child-like mind” was extremely influential during that time. In fact, the popularity of this novel among late Ming literati readers had a lot to do with this fascination with the kind of “genuineness” they found in certain of its characters.<sup>50</sup>

Here the famous story about the need to express personal feelings recorded in the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (A New Account of Tales of the World; attributed to Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 [ca. 403-444]) may help to further illustrate this difference:

When Wang Rong lost his son, Shan Jian went to visit him, Wang’s grief was such that he could not control himself, Jian said, “For a mere babe, why go to such lengths?”

Wang said, “A sage forgets his feelings; the lowest beings aren’t even capable of having feelings. But the place where feelings are most concentrated is precisely among people like ourselves [情之所鐘，正在我輩].”<sup>51</sup>

The phrase “the place where the feelings are most concentrated is precisely among people like ourselves” would later become a rallying call for many Ming-Qing literati who tried to advocate *qing*. This story is about a father’s feelings toward his deceased child (something even Confucius would not frown upon). However, when this phrase

<sup>49</sup> See the comments at the end of Chapter 47, *Shuihu zhuan huiping ben* 水滸傳會評本, ed. Chen Xizhong 陳曦鐘, et. al (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1981), vol. 2, p. 897.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Ma Jigao 馬積高, *Song Ming lixue yu wenxue* 宋明理學與文學 (Changsha: Hunan shifan daxue chubanshe, 1989), pp. 215-225.

<sup>51</sup> *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian* 世說新語校箋, ed. Xu Zhene 徐震鶚, 17.4, p. 349; English translation from *A New Account of Tales of the World*, trans. Richard B. Mather (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), p. 324. Here the Sage forgetting feelings must remind readers of the famous debate between He Yan 何晏 (d. ca. 249) and Wang Bi 王弼 (ca. 226-249). He Yan, following Zhuangzi 莊子 (bet. 399 and 295 B.C.), maintained that the sage did not have *qing*, while Wang Bi argued that while the sage was superior to other men in his intelligence, he was like other men in his having *qing*: “The emotions of the sage are such that though he reacts to things, he is not ensnared by them. It is a great error, consequently, to say that because he is not ensnared by things, he therefore has no (emotional) reactions to them.” *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 3:795; English translation from Fung Yulan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 2, p. 188.

was cited in late Ming literature, the context was often that of sexual love.<sup>52</sup> In fact, the tension between the need to maintain the values of *qing* as lofty sentiments and the pressures to use this same concept to justify physical desire became a central issue in many late Ming and early Qing works of drama and especially fiction.

### Strategies of Qing

It was probably due to *qing*'s close association with physical desires (the latter, of course, was more susceptible to ethical censorship in traditional China) that prompted some late Ming writers to try to emphasize *qing* as a mysterious power that could not be judged by the usual ethical standards. The classic example of this defense of *qing* was provided by the famous playwright Tang Xianzu:

What gives birth to love (*qing*) is unknown but love runs so deep. The living could die for love while the dead could also come back to life because of love. That which the living cannot die for and for which the dead could not be resurrected is not supreme love. . . . Alas, not every event in this world can be fully understood by us. I am not a man of full understanding who can account for everything in terms of reason/principle [*li* 理]. You never know when something absolutely impossible according to reason/principle may turn out be something absolutely possible according to love.<sup>53</sup>

First, *qing* is now associated with *sheng* 生 (life) rather than *xing* (nature) as has often been the case in philosophical discourse (this should not come as a surprise since Tang Xianzu had indicated that he wanted to talk about *qing* rather than *xing*). The tactic is to relate *qing* to the concept of *shengsheng* 生生 (perpetual renewal of life) from *Yijing* 易經 (The Book of Changes) in order to authenticate it ontologically.<sup>54</sup> Second, *qing* is described as a power that transcends the boundaries of life and death. Therefore *qing* is something that not only requires no apology but merits celebration just like life itself. Third, *qing* is conceived in opposition to *li* (reason or principle; the metaphysical moral concept in Neo-Confucianism).<sup>55</sup> The message is loud and clear: There are many

<sup>52</sup>See, for example, the reference at the beginning of the famous Ming novel *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (The Golden Lotus; also known in English as *The Plum in the Golden Vase*); *Jin Ping Mei cihua* 金瓶梅詞話 (Tokyo: Dai An, 1963), 1.1a.

<sup>53</sup>"*Mudan ting tic'*" 牡丹亭題詞, *Tang Xianzu shiwenji* 湯顯祖詩文集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1982), p. 1093.

<sup>54</sup>For a discussion of the philosophical background of Tang Xianzu's associating *qing* with the concept of *sheng*, see C. T. Hsia, "Time and the Human Condition in the Plays of T'ang Hsien-tsu," *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, ed. de Bary, pp. 249-251. See also Wai-yee Li's discussions of Tang's views of *qing* and their relations to his dramatic works, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, pp. 50-77.

<sup>55</sup>Of course, Tang Xianzu's view on the relationship between *qing* and *li* was complex and changing. Elsewhere, he seemed to be deeply bothered by his friend the famous monk Daguan Zhenke's 達觀真可 (1534-1603) insistence on the absolute mutual exclusiveness between *qing* and *li* (here *li* may have Buddhist implications). See his letter to Daguan, *Tang Xianzu shiwen ji*, p. 1268; for relevant discussions of this issue, see Zheng Peikai 鄭培凱, "Jiedao duoqing qingjinchi, cong Tang Xianzu dao Cao Xueqin" 解到多情情盡處—從湯顯祖到曹雪芹, in idem., *Tang Xianzu yu Wan-Ming wenhua* 湯顯祖與晚明文化 (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua

phenomena, such as the heroine Du Liniang's initial death and then resurrection for the sake of love in the play *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭 (The Peony Pavilion), that are beyond the logic of "principle" or "reason" but that are something that can only be explained by the power of *qing*. The logic of *qing* being argued here is that if dying for love is acceptable, we should also accept the possibility that someone might come back to life for the same reason. This is a question of whether one has enough faith in love (almost a "religious" question). Tang Xianzu's eloquent proclamation became the *locus classicus* on the boundless power of *qing*, to which other late Ming and early Qing promoters of *qing* would often appeal to for support. Obviously inspired by Tang Xianzu, the late Ming writer Zhang Qi 張琦 (dates unknown) pushed the hyperbolic rhetoric of *qing* even further:

Man is by nature rich in *qing*; a man without *qing* is not a human being, not to mention being a supreme man. When it becomes a material force, *qing* can shape what one sees and hears; it can ease one's spirits and facilitates one's reasoning; it can render one oblivious of day and night and insusceptible to cold and hunger; it enables one to reach every corner of the world and move Heaven and earth; it makes man the leader of all living things; it is the reasons for all the following: living being alive, the deceased being dead, the living dying, the deceased not having to die, and the living's forgetting about being alive. Its presence and power can be felt everywhere, near and far.<sup>56</sup>

*Qing* is presented as the defining essence of man and its transcending power is meticulously categorized in more concrete terms.

However, to appeal to a wider audience (including those souls that were not so romantic), the approach had to be more "pragmatic" rather than so "idealistic." Yuan Huang 袁黃 (1533-1606) offered a carefully-reasoned and fairly persuasive defense of *qing*. He tried to call attention to what he considered an important fact— *qing* was a much more effective concept than that of *li* in motivating people to behave more ethically:

In the ancient times, the sage kept order under Heaven by setting a good example of self-cultivation. This was nothing more than making full use of the *qing* of an individual. Man is born because of *qing* and there is *li* (reason/principle) because of man. *Li* is something not far away from *qing* in the first place. Scholars of later times pursue *li* while neglecting *qing*. They study so much that their minds are blocked. The more they understand *li* the less they know about how to harmonize their own six pulses

shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 1995), pp. 328-333.

<sup>56</sup>Zhang Qi, "Qingzhi wuyan" 情痴寤言, in idem, *Hengqu zhutan* 衡曲壘譚, in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng* 中國古典戲曲論著集成 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiqu chubanshe, 1959), vol. 4, p. 273. For a similar celebration of the mysterious power of *qing*, see Pan Zhiheng 潘之恆 (1556-1622), "Qingchi" 情痴, *Luanxiao xiaopin* 鵲橋小品 reprinted in *Pan Zhiheng quhua* 潘之恆曲話, comp. Wang Xiaoyi 汪效倚 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiqu chubanshe, 1988), p. 72; Tu Long 屠龍 (1542-1605) also associated *qing* with *sheng* in his preface to *Tihong ji* 題紅記, *Zhongguo gudian xiqu xuba huibian*, 中國古典戲曲序跋彙編, comp. Cai Yi 蔡毅 (Ji'nan: Qilu shushe, 1989), vol. 2, p. 1294.

[i.e. the practical knowledge about their own health); when given the reins, they do not know how to control a horse. All they should do is to think back about *qing*. . . . Some try to motivate people by punishment and reward; some try to motivate by predicating the judgment from Heaven; some try to motivate by the idea of reputation. All this is relying only on *li*. However, those good at motivating turn to *qing*: if *qing* is connected people will live in perfect harmony; if *qing* motivates one to go, one will travel a thousand miles as if under strict order; if *qing* compels one to die, one will go through all kinds of dangers as if death meant nothing; if *qing* makes one feel ashamed, one will refuse bribery and will not be tempted to pick up the things in the street even when called upon by others. . . . This is why those rich in *qing* are sages; those good at using *qing* are wise men; those who have *qing* but who cannot follow *qing* are men of incompetence; those who use *li* to cover up their own pedantry and idiosyncrasy are ruthless men [men without *qing*]. Those who really understand *li* should not use *li* to separate themselves from [other] people.<sup>57</sup>

Considered to have existed before *li*, *qing* is here granted ontological priority, a very bold step on Yuan Huang's part, since this directly contradicts the relevant view of the orthodox Neo-Confucianism. But what is more significant for our purpose here is that *qing* is now defended in the interest of public morality rather than for the sake of the emotional needs of an individual; in other words, it is largely justified here in terms of the maintenance of social order. This change of perspective from that of the individual self (as we have witnessed in remarks by people like Tang Xianzu) to that of the society should become more understandable when we learn that Yuan Huang was known as a moralist who started the practice of ledgers of merit and demerit (*gongguo ge* 功過格) during the late Ming.<sup>58</sup> However, Yuan Huang's particular approach did reflect a common tendency among some of the *qing* advocates who tried hard to alleviate the tension within the different implications of *qing* as a broadly defined concept. On the one hand, when emphasized as "personal emotions" or "passions" that defied the logic of reason/principle, *qing* often carried the potential to subvert social order, or, as Zhu Xi graphically warned, *qing* could become "violent waves" that would damage the dam to cause a flood; on the other hand, when emphasized as "reality," "virtue" or as what was in perfect accordance with *xing* (here *xing* is one's moral nature as understood in Neo-Confucianism), *qing* could mean what would contribute to the maintenance of moral order and social hierarchy or the *raison d'être* of such order or hierarchy, the precise opposite of what this same concept seemed to mean in the previous context.

This ambiguity is precisely what some of these late Ming writers aimed to exploit when they tried to legitimize *qing*. A consequence of such attempts, however, was

<sup>57</sup> Yuan Huang, "Qingli lun" 情理論, *Lianghang zhai ji* 兩行齋集, 1.1a-2a (Ming manuscript edition in Shanghai Municipal Library).

<sup>58</sup> For a study of Yuan Huang and the uses of these ledgers, see Cynthia J. Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Changes and Moral Order in Late Imperial China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).



often the simultaneous containment of *qing*. Some of Feng Menglong's well-known views on *qing* might be good examples:

The Six Confucian Classics all try to instruct through *qing*. For instance, the *Book of Changes* reveres *qing*; the *Book of Poetry* begins with "Guanju" [a love song]; the *Book of Documents* includes an account of Yu's marriage; the *Book of Rites* discourses on the distinction between a woman married with proper betrothal and one without proper betrothal; and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* quotes in detail a love poem about Ji and Jiang. This is all due to the fact that *qing* begins with what is between man and woman. Since *qing* is something shared by the common people, the Sage should give proper guidance in this regard so that they can avoid being misled and it can be channeled abundantly into the relations between ruler and minister, between father and son, between brothers and among friends.<sup>59</sup>

Elsewhere Feng Menglong insists that his *Qingshi* was designed to "transform the private feelings into public sentiments" (*siqing huagong* 私情化公).<sup>60</sup>

*Qing* is valorized here as absolutely essential to the maintenance of the Confucian social order. Consequently, the kind of tension between *qing* and *li* that we have witnessed in Tang Xianzu seem to have lessened considerably in Feng Menglong. What Feng would like to achieve was *li* being accommodated into *qing*, thus making the former more "humane" (*you renqing wei* 有人情味).

However, this legitimizing strategy was double-edged: on the one hand, it prioritized *qing*; on the other hand, it tended to emphasize the compatibility between *qing* and *li*, consequently diminishing the distinctions between the two. Despite all this, here *li* was nevertheless presented in a less desirable light in comparison with *qing*, and the emphasis was on the former's "unreasonableness" and "unnaturalness." To highlight such unreasonableness and unnaturalness, *qing* had to be presented in contrast to *li*, at least in rhetoric. The tension between these two poles was still there, although considerably lessened when compared with that in writings by people like Tang Xianzu. This was going to change with some early *Qing* writers whose approach to this problem was substantially different.

Rather than pairing *qing* with *xing* (nature) as it was often the case in traditional Chinese philosophical discourse, some preferred to pair the concept of *qing* with *li* (principle or reason), probably due to the fact that *li*, as a Neo-Confucian metaphysical concept, appeared more "impersonal" than that of *xing* (therefore more reason to underscore the need to accommodate *qing*). In addition, since there was already a long philosophical tradition of emphasizing the compatibility between *xing* and *qing* (no matter how minor this tradition had become after the Han dynasty), *li* might be a preferable term to relate to, when the purpose was to prioritize *qing* by focusing on its

<sup>59</sup>"Xu" 紱 (written under the name of Zhazhan waishi 詹詹外史), *Qingshi*, Feng Menglong *quanji*, vol. 37, 1a-2b (pp. 1-3).

<sup>60</sup>"*Qingshi xu*," *ibid.*, 2b (p. 4).

uniqueness. However, *xing* became a more preferable concept to be paired with *qing* when “accommodating” as well as “containing” were major concerns. This revisionist trend was of course already visible among some late Ming writers when the cult of *qing* was still in full swing. For example, the late Ming playwright Meng Chengshun 孟稱舜 (1600-1655) offered a typical apology for *qing* by insisting that it was not different at all from *xing* in terms of moral implications:

Man and woman feel attracted toward each other all because of *qing*, while *qing* has the appearance of being morally incorrect. My question is why faithful women in this world are all women of *qing*? . . . This play is a story about *qing*, and yet it is also a story about *xing* (nature), just as Mencius has said, “If people are allowed to follow their *qing*, they will be able to do good” . . . The temple built in memory of this chaste woman cost plenty of money, which was collected from her admirers everywhere; most of the money used to print the text of this play was donated by people from my native town as well as from Jinling. To praise and promote an act of female virtue and improve social morals are the feelings [*qing*] shared by many people. This is not something that could be accomplished by one person like me. This is all due to [many people’s] moral nature [*xing*], which is absolutely good.<sup>61</sup>

Obviously Meng Chengshun here is appealing to the authority of Mencius, who is believed to have said that *qing* is all good. As we have noted at the beginning of this study, *qing* in pre-Han usage was much closer in meaning to *xing*, and the two terms sometimes were even interchangeable. Mencius’s use of *qing* was certainly the most famous case. Meng Chengshun’s specific tactic is to play up the ambiguities of *qing* by referring to its particular use in an ancient text, a use with which many people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were probably no longer familiar thanks to the long historical evolution of the concept of *qing*.

This “containing/accommodating” tendency became even stronger in some early Qing writers as many of them began to reexamine the implications of aspects of the late Ming intellectual legacy in the aftermath of the violent collapse of the Ming in the middle of the seventeenth century. These writers, while still trying to valorize *qing*, changed their rhetorical focus to the commonality between *qing* and *xing*. In his preface to the early Qing novel *Dingqing ren* 定情人 (The Faithful Lovers), the Master of the Hall of Clean Governing (Suzhengtang zhuren 素政堂主人) writes that one necessary precondition for restraining mind and correcting nature (*shouxin zhengxing* 收心正情) is the stability of *qing* (*dingqing* 定情), which, in the context of the novel, actually means being faithful in love.<sup>62</sup> Thus, *qing* or love is granted its legitimacy primarily

<sup>61</sup>“Tici” 題詞, *Yingwu mu zhenwen ji* 鸚鵡墓貞文記, rpt. in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu xuba huibian*, vol. 2, pp. 1353-1354; see also his preface to his play *Jiaohong ji* 嬌紅記 (p. 1354).

<sup>62</sup>“*Dingqing ren xu*” 定情人序 *Dingqing ren* (Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe, 1983), p. 154-156. It is very likely that the author here chooses to use the term “*dingqing*” to describe “faithfulness in love” because he wishes to enhance the authority of his own discourse on *qing* by relating it to the Song Neo-Confucian Cheng Hao’s 程顥 well-known theory about *dingxing* 定性 (stabilizing nature). For a discussion of Cheng Hao’s *Dingxing shu* 定性書 (On Stabilizing Nature), see Zhang Yongjun 張永俊, “Du Cheng Mingdao *Dingxing*

because of its important ethical value. And he further emphasizes that *qing* is not easy to stabilize due to the fact that it is something very similar to mind (*xin*) but not mind itself, and very similar to nature (*xing*) but too active (*yifa*) to be nature.<sup>63</sup> The point is that those who can stabilize *qing* are worthy of extra admiration. The author, through the voice of the novel's male protagonist Shuangxing, proclaims that "proper relations between ruler and minister and between father and son are based on nature (*xing*), and therefore one's nature can fully manifest itself in acts of loyalty and filiality. However, a good relationship between husband and wife depends not only on [the couple's] nature but also on [their] feelings (*qing*)."<sup>64</sup> We are told that a man's desire for a pretty woman is a result of both *xing* and *qing* (好色原兼性和情).<sup>65</sup> Later the female protagonist, before allowing herself to fall in love with Shuangxing, must determine his *xingqing* 性情 because she believes that he won't be a faithful lover if his nature is not yet stabilized (*xing buding* 性不定) and that he won't be someone to whom she could entrust her life if he is not deep in feelings (*qingshen* 情深).<sup>66</sup>

A very similar view can be found in the preface to another early Qing novel *Jin Yun Qiao zhuan* 金雲翹傳 (The Story of [Three Women Named] Jin, Yun and Qiao). Here the Master of the House of Heavenly Flowers (Tianhuazang zhuren 天花藏主人) tries to justify *qing* in terms of its close relationship with *xing*:

It is said that what Heaven has conferred on us is nature [*tianming weixing* 天命為性], while [an examination of] one's nature is supposed to be able to offer a full explanation as to why one is faithful or unfaithful in love. [If everyone's nature is the same], why should different people have different responses to a similar situation? What one's nature can fully explain is only something general. Liking, disliking, sorrow and pleasure, which one's nature is capable of, are wonderful *qing*. This wonderful *qing* is what gives rise to love and attachment, which, in turn, can become extreme and indulgent. . . . If one is able to keep his *qing* in accordance with *xing* [持情以合性], he could remain shiny even if he had been abraded, he could maintain his true color even if he had been dyed, and he could keep himself clean even if he had been buried in dirt. . . . If our nature is only what Heaven can confer on us, then [our] *qing* must be something beyond Heaven's dictate [天但可命性而不可命情].<sup>67</sup>

Taking a cue from the Confucian classic *The Doctrine of the Mean* that our nature is what Heaven has conferred on us, the Master of the House of Heavenly Flowers tries to argue that each individual has his or her own *qing* (because different people have

*shu*," 讀程明道定性書, *Er Cheng xue guanjian* 二程學管見 (Taipei: Dongda tushu gongsi, 1988), pp. 1-36.

<sup>63</sup>*Dingqing ren*, p. 154.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.5.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.1.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.35.

<sup>67</sup>"Xu," 序 *Jin Yun Qiao zhuan*, in *Ming Qing yangqing xiaoshuo daguan* 明清言情小說大觀, ed. Yin Guoguang 尹國光, et al. (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1993), vol. 2, pp. 3-4; The Master of the House of Heavenly Flowers has expressed a similar view in his preface to another early Qing novel; see *Pingshan Lengyan*, p. 232.

different responses to the same environment). Consequently, without taking into consideration an individual's *qing*, we cannot explain accurately the moral implications of that individual's action. While judiciously conceding the "supreme" moral status to nature (namely, *qing* should always be kept in line with *xing*), he tries to stress the special functions of *qing* which cannot be fulfilled by one's nature but which are nevertheless crucial to one's moral well-being. *Qing* becomes even more important because it is not something dictated by Heaven, as nature is; therefore totally dependent on an individual's own moral initiative.

Paradoxically, a tactic shared by both the Master of the Hall of Clean Governing and the Master of the House of Heavenly Flowers is to promote the importance of *qing* by strictly following the moral logic of the orthodox Neo-Confucian view that regards *qing* as a potential moral suspect due to its "active" nature (the state after being aroused or *yifa*): far more attention is needed to be devoted to *qing* precisely because of its "instability;" by the same token, those who are able to stabilize their *qing* merit even more respect. Here *qing* is valorized almost by default: *qing* deserves more attention (even admiration if it is tamed) because of its potential for harming one's moral nature [*luanxing* 亂性].<sup>68</sup> The reader must have been struck by the Neo-Confucian rhetoric of these two authors. Both of them seem determined to find some maneuvering room for *qing* within the moral world of orthodox Neo-Confucian ideology. The price of legitimizing *qing* is ultimately *qing* being co-opted into *xing*, which, in Neo-Confucianism, represents perfect tranquillity (*weifa*) and moral order. Compared with some of the late Ming writers' more radical views, the posture of a retreat is quite visible here even though *qing* continued to be valorized as well as cherished. This kind of "retreat" might be understood, at least in part, as a result of the reaction against what these early Qing writers must have perceived to be the overindulgence in various forms of desire during the late Ming, which, they thought, had given *qing* a bad name. In other words, they were trying to rehabilitate *qing*'s reputation by containing its possible radical implications.<sup>69</sup> This leads us to the next important issue in the cult of *qing*—the subtle relationship between *qing* as romantic sentiments and *qing* as physical desires.

### *Between Desires and Sentiments*

The idea of *qing* became so fashionable as a result of the cult that some writers

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., vol. 2, p. 3.

<sup>69</sup>So far I have mainly discussed fictional works. For discussions of this "conservative retreat" as reflected in the dramatic works of this period, see Guo Yingde 郭英德, *Ming Qing wenren chuanqi yanjiu* 明清文人傳奇研究 (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 1992), pp. 62-67 and 111-115; Wai-yee Li also detects an increasing emphasis on "order" in the views on *qing* expressed by Feng Menglong and Chen Jiru and in Pu Songling's 蒲松齡 (1640-1715) representations of "desires" in his *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異 (Strange Stories from the Studio of Leisure), *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, pp. 89-151; of interest is also Dorothy Ko's discussion of the early Qing Confucian thinker Li Gong 李塨 (1659-1733) in her essay "Thinking about Copulating: An Early-Qing Confucian Thinker's Problem with Emotion and Words," *Remapping China: Fissures in Historical Terms*, ed. Gail Hersherter, et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 59-76.

tried to use this concept to enhance the legitimacy of *xiaoshuo* 小說 (vernacular fiction) and drama, which, as literary genres of a relatively low social status, were still fighting for acceptance among the social elite. Wang Jide 王驥德 (d. 1623) argued that compared with *shi* 詩 (poetry) and *ci* 詞 (lyrics), *qu* 曲 (dramatic songs and drama) as a literary genre was much more valuable precisely because of its unique capacity to dramatize *qing* under much fewer generic constraints.<sup>70</sup> The early Qing dramatist Hong Sheng 洪昇 (1645-1705) contended that no playwright could conquer his audience without focusing his work on *qing*.<sup>71</sup> While love was believed by many Ming-Qing playwrights to be the most important thematic concern of drama,<sup>72</sup> some fiction writers also insisted that one crucial generic feature of fiction was its emphasis on romance and passion between man and woman. The author of the late Ming collection of erotic stories *Huanxi yuanjia* 歡喜冤家 (Enemies in Love) claims that fiction writers should focus on the world of romantic love (*fengyue zhi xiang* 風月之鄉),<sup>73</sup> whereas the publisher of the early Qing erotic fiction *Chundeng nao* 春燈鬧 (The Celebration of the Lantern Festival) proclaims that whereas official history (*zhengshi* 正史) is concerned primarily with “righteousness” (*yi* 義), fiction should instead concentrate on “passion” (*qing* 情), suggesting that its value as an independent narrative genre lies precisely in such a different focus.<sup>74</sup> This is a very bold statement, implying that *qing* and morality are two different issues. *Qing* by itself is valuable enough to merit full attention in fiction that it does not need to be justified in terms of moral desirability.

For other writers, at least on the surface, *qing* still needs to be justified in the name of moral efficacy. The implications of *qing*, however, are different now. The preface attached to the late Ming erotic novel *Langshi* 浪史 [A History of Debauchery] should help to elucidate this difference:

In this world, for thousands of years people simply cannot read enough of those little books about what happens between a man and a woman in the inner chamber. Why? This is because of *qing*. The presence of *qing* brings about union while its absence results in separation. This is why Confucius did not censor those love poems when editing *The Book of Poetry*, which has been able to serve the important functions of

<sup>70</sup>Wang Jide, “Zalun” 雜論, *Qulu* 曲律, in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng*, vol. 4, 166.

<sup>71</sup>“Changsheng dian zixu” 自序, rpt. in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu xuba huibian*, vol. 3, p. 1578. For a discussion of *qing* as represented in Hong Sheng’s famous play *Changsheng dian* 長生殿 (The Palace of Everlasting Love), see Wai-ye Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, pp. 77-81.

<sup>72</sup>See, for example, the observation made by Li Yu that “nine of ten *chuanqi* plays are about love [傳奇十部九相思]” in the concluding poem to his play *Lianxiang ban* 憐香伴, in *Li Yu quanji*, vol. 4, p. 110.

<sup>73</sup>“Huanxi yuanjia xu” 歡喜冤家敘, *Huanxi yuanjia*, in the *Siwuxie huibao* series, vol. 1, p. 77.

<sup>74</sup>See the Zizhou xuan zhuren’s 紫宙軒主人 colophon on the title page of the Zizhou xuan edition of the novel, reprinted in *Chundeng nao*, *Siwuxie huibao* series, p. 231. This early Qing novel was later reprinted by the publisher Xiaohua xuan 嘯花軒 with some minor changes (especially the ending) under the new title *Dengyue yuan* 燈月緣; a facsimile edition of *Dengyue yuan* is available in the *Guben xiaoshuo jicheng* 古本小說集成 series (Shanghai guji, 1990). For a brief discussion of its textual history, see *Chundeng nao*, p. 229, and Li Mengsheng 李夢生, *Zhongguo jinhui xiaoshuo baihua* 中國禁毀小說百話 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1994), pp. 275-279.

"stirring the mind," "contemplation," "expressing fellowship" and "showing resentment" [*xing guan qun yuan* 興觀群怨]. The feelings of a loyal minister or a filial son may not necessarily be genuine *qing* but the love between a man and a woman can not be false in nine cases out of ten. A reading of the romance depicted in *Langshi* should transform a person without *qing* into someone with *qing*. *Qing* is first nurtured in the inner chamber; then it will expand and develop [*kuo er chongzhi* 擴而充之] in a person to enable him to become a loyal minister as well as a filial son.<sup>75</sup>

On the surface the rhetoric advocating *qing* reminds us of Feng Menglong's much more famous preface to *Qingshi* previously quoted. Both authors emphasize that the most important *qing* is that between man and woman, which in fact is said to be the foundation upon which other relationships, such as those between a ruler and his ministers or between father and son, are based.<sup>76</sup> In other words, to be a loyal minister or a filial son, both authors insist, one has to learn to be committed to *qing*, especially the kind of *qing* that exists between man and woman; both authors appeal to the authority of the Confucian classics for rhetorical power.<sup>77</sup>

However, one crucial difference regarding *qing* in *Langshi* is implicitly referred to at the beginning of the preface: *qing* is here defined as "what happens between man and woman in the inner chamber," a difference that becomes abundantly clear when

<sup>75</sup>*Langshi*, p. 37. Here "expand and develop" [*kuo er chongzhi*] is apparently employed by the author to remind the reader of Mencius's usage of this same phrase in his well-known remarks about the need to develop a person's innate goodness (or the so-called "four sprouts" *siduan* 四端). See Mengzi, 2A.6 (Zhuzi jicheng ed., p. 140).

<sup>76</sup>This rhetoric advocating *qing* became so popular then that Wang Fuzhi found it necessary to clarify what he perceived to be the "confusion." Agreeing with the view that "love is not necessarily benevolence and that only the principle of love is benevolence [愛未是仁, 愛之理方是理], he argued that "love (*ai* 愛) is feelings (*qing*) while the principle (*li*) is nature (*xing*)" and pointed out: "Recently there is a theory advocating that the fact that a person is capable of deep *qing* [鍾情正在我輩] should guarantee his becoming a filial son and a loyal minister. This sounds very persuasive but is extremely harmful to one's mind and body." See "Gaozi shangpian" 告子上篇, *Du Sishu daquan* 讀四書大全, *juan* 10, *Chuanshan quanshu*, vol. 6, pp. 1059-1060; According to Wang Fuzhi, this was a result of confusing *qing* with *xing*. He believed that Mencius's so-called "four sprouts" (*siduan*), such as commiseration (*ceyin* 惻隱), were *xing* rather than *qing* and that those who equated *qing* between man and woman with filiality and loyalty were simply trivializing benevolence (*ren* 仁) into sexual love (在兒女之情上言仁), "Gaozi xiapian" 告子下篇, *Sishu daquan*, *juan* 10, *Chuanshan quanshu*, vol. 6, pp. 1065-1066; see also his similar criticism of the practice of "changing [the meaning of] *xing* to accommodate *qing* [遷性以就情], "Lun Jingnü" 論靜女 in "Beifeng," *Shi guangzhuang*, *juan* 1, *Chuanshan quanshu*, vol. 3, p. 327.

<sup>77</sup>The fact that both Feng Menglong's writings and the novel *Langshi* were closely associated with the cult of *qing* and *zhen* (the genuine) can be inferred from their shared use of the word *tongchi* 童痴 (childish foolishness). This harked back to Li Zhi's popular concept of *tongxin* (the child-like mind). One commentator of *Langshi* is named *Tongchi* while Feng Menglong used the same word to title his collections of folk songs. His two collections of folk songs are respectively titled as *Tongchi yi'ong*: *Gua Zhi'er* 童痴一弄掛枝兒 and *Tongchi ernong*: *Shan'ge* 童痴二弄山歌. If we accept Yuan-Hua Li Mowry's dating of *Qingshi* as completed between 1628 and 1632 ("Ch'ing-shih and Feng Meng-lung," pp. 449-456), then we have to entertain seriously the possibility of Feng having read *Langshi* and its preface (Youxuanzi 又玄子 was probably the author of both the novel and the preface) before he completed his own *Qingshi*. Another theory that *Qingshi* was compiled before 1620 (see Wang Lin, p. 128 and Li Mengsheng, p. 92) would not exclude completely this possibility. *Langshi* is mentioned in a preface (dated 1620) to the novel *Tianxu zhai pidian Bei Song san Sui pingyao zhuan* 天許齋批點北宋三遂平妖傳, a work believed to have been rewritten by Feng Menglong based on the novel *San Sui pingyao zhuan* 三遂平妖傳 attributed to Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中. For information on the textual history of *Langshi*, see "Langshi chuban shuoming" 浪史出版說明, in *Langshi*, pp. 15-19.

the novel proper begins to unfold. *Langshi* is a novel concentrating on the sexual adventures of the male protagonist—how he conquers various female beauties and finally becomes a Taoist immortal after achieving ultimate sexual gratification. *Qing* as represented in this novel seems to refer to pursuit of sexual gratification via promiscuity and it has little to do with the values Feng Menglong advocated, namely, *qingzhen* 情貞 (fidelity in love). In fact, Feng prided himself on his *Qingshi* for being able to accomplish the task of “spreading *qing*” (*guang qing* 廣情) while avoiding leading people onto the path of lust (*daoyu* 導欲).<sup>78</sup> Feng’s *qing* is conceived in opposition to *yu* (which means “excessive desire” or “lust” rather than “desire” per se).<sup>79</sup> Of course, the problem is that many of those who are only interested in lust or the “physical aspects” of desire also turned to the term of *qing* because of its ambiguities as well as the bad reputation of the word *yu*. As a result, the distinction between what Feng Menglong called *guangqing* and *daoyu* became rather problematic. How explicit could the description of sex in a work be while still being able to claim the “honor” of *guangqing*? What kind of behavior should be condemned as acts of lust rather than love? These questions become major concerns for certain later writers.

The Master of Moon-Heart of the Drunken West Lake (Zui Xihu xinyue zhuren 醉西湖心月主人) wrote two collections of stories that were apparently designed to serve as examples of love and lust respectively, although both collections deal almost exclusively with male homosexuality. *Bian er chai* 弁而釵 (Hairpins beneath the Cap) is a collection of four stories that are supposed to exemplify true *qing*. Their titles are: “*Qingzhen ji*” 情貞紀 (Story of Faithful Love), “*Qingxia ji*” 情俠紀 (The Story of Chivalrous Love), “*Qinglie ji*” 情烈紀 (The Story of Heroic Love), “*Qingqi ji*” 情奇紀 (The Story of Extraordinary Love). The Master of Moon-Heart’s classification of *qing* might have been influenced by Feng Menglong’s *Qingshi*, where all stories are classified into different categories to illustrate different aspects of love.<sup>80</sup> In “The Story of Heroic Love” in *Bian er chai*, *qing* is granted the power to “transcend” the gender boundaries: after consummating their relationship, Zhao Wangsun sighs that he, as a man, is willing to offer his body like a woman only because he has been moved by his lover’s deep love (*chiqing* 痴情). His male lover Feng Xiang consoles him this way:

The place where *qing* is most concentrated is precisely among people like ourselves [情之所鍾，正在我輩]. What we’ve done today is wrong if judged according to *li* (reason/principle); however, if judged by the logic of *qing*, it is possible for a man to become a woman, or for a woman to become a man, or for the living to die, or for the dead to come back to life. Those who are bound by the distinctions between man and

<sup>78</sup>“*Qingshi xu*,” *Qingshi*, 3b (p. 6).

<sup>79</sup>Of course, Feng Menglong never tried to exclude “physical desire” from *qing* as can be seen in many of his vernacular stories as well as in some of the stories in his *Qingshi*.

<sup>80</sup>Again, even if we accept Mowry’s relatively later dating of *Qingshi* (between 1628 and 1632), there still was a possibility that the Master of Moon-Heart had read it before he wrote *Bian er chai*, which is believed to have been written sometime during the Chongzhen 崇禎 period (1627-1644). See “*Bian er chai* chuban shuoming” 弁而釵出版說明, *Bian er chai*, *Siwuxie huibao* series, pp. 17-18.

woman or life and death have not lived their *qing* to the fullest. As I've said before, the sea may dry up and rock may erode. It is only *qing*, however, that will never perish since it is not bound by the logic of *li*.<sup>81</sup>

As already pointed out by others, this inspiring speech reminds people of Tang Xianzu's famous preface to his *Mudan ting*.<sup>82</sup> What is interesting is that the transcending power Tang Xianzu attributed to *qing* is now appealed to for the sake of crossing gender boundaries. The dichotomy between *qing* and *li* envisioned by Tang is underscored here to legitimize homosexual love. Furthermore, the authority of the *locus classicus* of *qing* in *Shishuo xinyu*, which is originally about the attachment between father and son, is now called upon to defend the love between two men. Despite this persistent emphasis on *qing* as romantic sentiment, physical aspects of homosexual love are never ignored in *Bian er chai* in the sense that love can only be ultimately fulfilled and consummated in physical union.<sup>83</sup> Our novelist is searching for the appropriate "sentiments" of desire.

If *Bian er chai* is intended to be exemplary in representing the perfect union between sentiments and desires, then the Master of Moon-Heart's second collection *Yixiang chunzhi* 宜香春質 (Fragrance of the Pleasant Spring) was obviously written for the opposite purpose of demonstrating the danger of excessive desire or lust. The four stories in this collection are respectively titled as *Fengji* 風集 (The Wind), *Huaji* 花集 (The Flowers), *Xueji* 雪集 (The Snow), and *Yueji* 月集 (The Moon). As commonly understood, the four words "wind," "flower," "snow" and "moon," when read together as *fenghua xueyue*, usually mean "indigence in sexual romance." At the beginning of the first story, the narrator launches into a long harangue on *qing* and the need to avoid excess:

A sage forgets his *qing*; the lowest beings aren't even capable of having *qing*. But the place where *qing* is most concentrated is precisely among people like ourselves. If people like ourselves do not have *qing*, there will be no *qing* in the world. Our having *qing* means we are capable of becoming good; not having *qing* means that we are capable of becoming bad. Dissipation (*dangqing* 蕩情) is capable of becoming good or bad. If this world were without *qing*, I would want *qing* to be there. If this world were overindulging in *qing*, then I would be worried about dissipation. If *qing* develops into dissipation, it will harm the world. Dissipation originates from *qing* but it can harm *qing*.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>81</sup>*Bian er chai*, 1.97-98.

<sup>82</sup>McMahon, *Causality and Containment in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), pp. 74-75. A more detailed discussion of *Bian er chai* can be found in Giovanni Vitiello's Ph. D. dissertation "Exemplary Sodomites: Male Homosexuality in Late Ming Fiction" (University of California, Berkeley, 1994), pp. 83-132.

<sup>83</sup>Cf. McMahon's observation: "Another facet of his theme is to show that emotional fulfillment in *qing* cannot be complete without its sensual complement," *Causality and Containment*, p. 75.

<sup>84</sup>*Yichun xiangzhi*, *Siwuxie huibao* series, pp. 95-96. See also Vitiello's relevant discussions of *Yichun*



Once again the *locus classicus* in *Shishuo xinyu* is appealed to at the very beginning. However, what the narrator is trying to emphasize is the balance between having no *qing* and having excessive *qing*. All the stories in this collection are meant to be warnings about the consequences of such excess. In his “personal-comments” (*ziping* 自評) at the end of the first chapter of the last story, the author calls attention to the futility of trying to escape from *qing*: “Those affected souls proclaim themselves to be high above *qing* and beyond *qing*’s control, not knowing that they are already trapped in *qing*.”<sup>85</sup> He seems to be suggesting that the only feasible approach is to face *qing* and that one can achieve enlightenment only after experiencing intense *qing*. This is demonstrated in the last story, which is about how its protagonist becoming a Taoist immortal after going through various trials of *qing* in a long and tortuous dream.<sup>86</sup>

The Master of the Su Temple (Su’an zhuren 蘇庵主人), the author of the seventeenth-century novel *Xiuping yuan* 繡屏緣 (The Romance of the Embroidered Screen) seems to be one of those most conscientious about vindicating *qing* as something distinguished from lust. In the preface to this novel, the gentleman with the name of the Master of the Studio of Observing Grace and Fragrance (Wangmeixiang Zhuren 望美香主人) tells us that the novelist has written this work largely because he is worried that “emotions” (*qinghuai* 情懷) are being drowned in the sea of lusts (*yu hai* 欲海); he declares that those who ruin themselves by overindulging in *qing* are not different from those who are without *qing* [*renqing zhiwu dengyu wuqing* 任情之誤,等於無情].<sup>87</sup>

The commentator (who was very likely the novelist himself) observes in his chapter-end comments for Chapter Seven:

It is natural for those fiction writers, after suffering frustrations in life, to preach something high-sounding [*daoxue hua* 道學話]. They warn their readers that he who cuckolds others is to receive retributive punishment. This is just like someone who likes to eat good food complaining about the smell it leaves. This is really boring! In the past Tang Linchuan [Tang Xianzu] has said in his preface to *Mudan ting*: “I am not a man of full understanding who can account for everything in terms of reason/principle [*li* 理]. You never know when something absolutely impossible according to reason/principle may turn out to be something absolutely possible according to love.” The message in this remark can really please an erudite scholar. (S, 7.137; Z, p. 2274)

The commentator seems to be saying that since *qing* is a phenomenon that cannot be explained by reason as Tang Xianzu has said, why bother trying to explain it by the

*xiangzhi* (pp. 133-180).

<sup>85</sup> *Yichun xiangzhi*, p. 303.

<sup>86</sup> For a detailed discussion of this story, see Vitiello, pp. 163-180.

<sup>87</sup> “*Xiuping yuan xu*” 繡屏緣序 (dated 1670), *Xiuping yuan* (Taipei: Shuangdi guoji shiwu youxian gongsi, 1995), p. 41 (hereafter as S with chapter and page references given in parenthesis); see also *Xiuping yuan*, in the *Guben xiaoshuo congkan* 古本小說叢刊 series (a fcs. rpt of the hand-copied edition in van Gulik collection; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), pp. 2123-2125 (hereafter as Z with page reference given in parenthesis).

far-fetched logic of karmic retribution? Obviously what is being critiqued here is the didactic conventions adopted by many erotic fiction writers during the late Ming and early Qing. A more specific target must be the famous erotic novel *Rou putuan* 肉浦團 (Carnal Prayer Mat; attributed to Li Yu's 李漁 [1611-1680]; its male protagonist is said to have been cuckolded by the husbands of those women with whom he has sommitted adultery; a case of exact retribution), also because *Rou putuan* is explicitly named in the chapter-end comments for Chapter Six:

When Zhao Yunke meets Yuhuan [the hero and heroine in *Xiuping yuan*] for the first time, they show both respect and love for each other but they do not become intimate with each other. If this had happened in *Rou putuan*, the reader would surely be bombarded with details about various obscene acts. Those real lovers (*qingzhong* 情鍾) do not easily give in to their desire like animals. (S, 6. 126; Z, pp. 2255-2256)

This kind of animal-like behavior should be denounced precisely because it is a case where "desire gets there before feelings arrive" (情未至而欲先之; S, 6. 126; Z, p. 2255). Of course, erotic novels, such as *Rou putuan*, are known for their lack of interest in *qing* understood as "romantic sentiments."<sup>88</sup> In fact, as soon as *Xiuping yuan* begins, the narrator launches a lengthy discourse to distinguish *qing* from *yu*:

To consider a woman's promiscuity as *sijing* 私情 (secret love) is really doing violence to the concept of *qing*. A woman's promiscuity could only be regarded as debauchery. Today sleeping with this one and tomorrow with another are anything but acts of *qing*. . . . It is what happens between two hearts [*fangcun zhijian* 方寸之間] that really matters. This is what *qing* is all about and [this true *qing*] can actually prevent debauchery from spreading. Those novels about using debauchery to teach morality [*jieyin shuofa* 借淫說法] are themselves lewd books. If a man has no *qing*, why should we resort to the trick of karmic retribution? All this stems from the failure to explain the real implications of *qing*. This in turn lends a bad name to the idea of "scholar and beauty romances." (S, 1.50-51; Z, p. 2142)

*Xiuping yuan* as a novel seems preoccupied with *qing*, and its definition of *qing* appears to be "that which happens between two hearts," pure romantic sentiments.<sup>89</sup> Each of the female characters involved with the male protagonist Zhong Yunke is said to represent one unique aspect of love (*qing*): for example, Yuhuan is loving and righteous (*qing er zheng* 情而正); Sujing is loving and gallant (*qing er xia* 情而俠); Jiangying is loving and chaste (*qing er jie* 情而節), etc. The novel claims to present a collection of genuine lovers (*qingzhong* 情種). The protagonist Zhao Yunke's formal name is Qingxin 青心. The two characters contained in his name are actually the two elements that

<sup>88</sup>Patrick Hanan notes the absence of *qing* in Li Yu's fiction in his study *The Invention of Li Yu* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 122-123.

<sup>89</sup>A point the author repeats in his "Fanli" 凡例 (here he uses the term *cunqing* 寸情; S, p. 44; Z, p. 2132).

make up the word *qing* 情. (S, p. 42; Z, p. 2127) Consequently, Zhao Yunke must be the ultimate lover (*qingzhong*) as well as the connoisseur of *qing* (who appreciates and savors various kinds of female *qing* embodied by his five wives). Up to now one might get the impression that *Xiuping yuan* is a work of “chaste romance” that valorizes only “romantic sentiments” such as *Dingqing ren* that we have previously discussed. However, the fact is that this is a “high erotic novel” full of explicit accounts of sexual activities (see, for example, the orgy scene in Chapter Eighteen, although such group sex is sanctioned in the institution of polygamy).<sup>90</sup> “Today sleeping with this one tomorrow with another” is only considered an act of debauchery unworthy of the name of *qing* when applied to women. A man can have as many lovers as he wants so long he eventually marries them in the end (his *qing* is measured in part by the fact that he does not desert that woman once he falls in love with another), while all the female characters who fall in love with Zhong Yunke are considered worthy of the title of great lovers (*qingzhong*) precisely because they are faithful to only one man. Their having “romantic sentiments,” however, does not exclude enjoying sex, and the capacity on the part of a man to meet their demand for sexual gratification (*seliang* 色量) is actually deemed as an important aspect of *qing* as far as our male protagonist is concerned.

What is intriguing about *Xiuping yuan* as an erotic romance is the high degree of self-consciousness with which its author attempts to tease the reader’s various conventional expectations of *qing* by juxtaposing elements of chaste romance (emphasizing romantic sentiments) with those of erotic fiction (underscoring sexual desire). A favorable tactic is to present the “exquisite” idea of *qing* as romantic sentiments by “repackaging” it in a language of ribaldry:

When two beautiful people are together, what is important is the two hearts being connected. Thus, the love will be so deep that the living is willing to die for love, and, by the same token, the dead can be resurrected, even if they don’t do that thing [*zhejian goudang* 這件勾當]. *Qing* is what makes the male and female mandarin ducks cling together and become inseparable from each other, even though they do not always mate [*daxiong* 打雄]. (S, 1. 51; Z, pp. 2142-2143)

Here Tang Xianzu’s lofty rhetoric of *qing* is purposely juxtaposed with vulgar references to the mating of animals (note especially words such as *daxiong*). According to the narrator, a central qualification for being a true lover is knowing how to enjoy making love instead of considering sex only as an act of procreation:

Nowadays, when sleeping together, one will be on top of the other, doing this thing for a few times. They are quite content while doing it. The moment it is done, they turn over and fall asleep. Next morning, when they wake up, they only think about

<sup>90</sup>Terms such as “chaste romance” and “high erotic” are borrowed from Keith McMahon, *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 99 and 131.

various family chores. Time after time like this, one will get pregnant with a baby, whether a boy or a girl. Besides creating babies, the only use of their things is pissing. If you ask the man about the reasons for having sex, he does not know a thing. When asked to appreciate some erotic pictures, he feels awkward imitating the positions depicted in these pictures. These people only have "pissing sticks" [*sa'niao gun* 撒尿棍] and "child-bearing nests" [*zhongzi ke* 種子窠]. How could they know anything about the principles of yin and yang? (S, 18. 270; Z, pp. 2476-2477)

Elsewhere, the narrator tries to reassert the privileges of scholars (*caizi* 才子) and beauties (*jiaren* 佳人) using similarly ribald rhetoric:

Whether one is from a poor family or a rich family, a true beauty (*jiaren*) must be matched with a brilliant scholar (*caizi*). For those who are not perfect either in appearance or in talent, they'd better pack up their pissing sticks or child-bearing nests and quit trying to be romantic altogether. This is my advice to the people of this world: you should first check your own face in the mirror and then measure your thing in the middle; don't pretend anything that will only provoke contempt from me. There is a saying "God and the Jade Emperor could be persuaded to be easy on anything but this serious matter of 'secret love [*siqing* 私情]'". Only those talented scholars and romantic beauties are allowed to practice this and the rest are barred. . . . This is as simple as the fact that people like to see beautiful butterflies mating because they won't feel disgusted. However, when they see snakes or lizards mating, they only want to kill them. (S, 20. 293-294; Z, pp. 2505-2506)

Here the narrator is repeating the romantic cliché about "scholars and beauties" yet in an extremely ribald manner, as if the ultimate purpose is to unmask the inadequacy of the genteel romantic ideal of "scholar and beauty" for its neglect of the importance of physical desire. *Qing* that excludes physical desire is not authentic *qing*, although the narrator also maintains that "*qing* should always arrive before *yu*."<sup>91</sup>

In general, *Xiuping yuan*'s agenda of redefining *qing* is fulfilled, if it is fulfilled at all, by virtue of parody. Its obsession with the so-called "purity" of *qing* sometimes reminds the reader of works of chaste romance such as *Dingqing ren* (though not its Neo-Confucian rhetoric; *daoxue* is something constantly satirized in the novel),<sup>92</sup> while the narrator's witty and yet sometimes ribald discursive discourse reminds the reader of *Rou putuan*. As a novel written in the late seventeenth century, *Xiuping yuan* is an interesting (though it may not be a serious) attempt to reexamine the relationship between *qing* and *yu* in terms of eroticizing and problematicizing the former.<sup>93</sup> *Bian er*

<sup>91</sup>Cf. McMahon's discussions of *Xiuping yuan* in his *Misers, Shrews, Polygamists*, pp. 133-137; he (p. 134) observes: "*Xiuping yuan*'s pretensions to being a classic romance lie in its direct utterance of *caizi jiaren* manifestos. . . . *Xiuping yuan* makes explicit the point in chaste romance that scholars and beauties are special cases towering above everyone else. Now their privileges apply in sexual terms as well."

<sup>92</sup>Zhu Xi is explicitly satirized in the chapter-end comment of Chapter Three (S, 3.81-82; Z, pp. 2191-2192).

<sup>93</sup>Of course, some Ming-Qing writers made no distinction between *qing* and *yu*. For example, throughout the famous seventeenth-century novel *Xiyou bu* 西游補 (A Sequel to the Journey to the West), the term *qing*

*chai*, *Yixiang chunzhi* and *Xiuping yuan* represent a relatively new tendency in certain works of erotic fiction (beginning from the early seventeenth century) to eroticize *qing*, while, at the same time, trying to insist on its “authenticity” by disclaiming its associations with *yu* (understood here as “lust”).

For a more serious and elaborate attempt to reevaluate the issue of *qing* we have to wait till the mid-eighteenth century for the full-length novel *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 (The Dream of the Red Chamber; also known in English as The Story of the Stone), where the complicated rethinking process is accomplished on a much higher level of sophistication and where the main concern seems to have changed to that of the inadequacy of the language of *qing* although the problem of *qing* and *yu* remains a prominent issue.<sup>94</sup>

In conclusion, we might tentatively say that the cult of *qing* which began to rise during the sixteenth century was a result of many interrelated factors, among which its “appropriation” on the part of those disenfranchised literati was significant. These literati tended to exploit the ambiguities associated with *qing* for their own agenda. An important feature of this Ming-Qing cult movement is the fact that *qing* was now a central issue in many works of vernacular fiction and drama, while previously the significance of *qing* had been mainly confined to poetic discourse. A direct consequence of this more “prosaic” approach to *qing* was the dramatic heightening of the tension inherent in the concept of *qing*, the tension between its sometimes contradictory implications: *qing* as lofty romantic sentiments and *qing* as physical desires. This problem became even more serious when some early Qing advocates of *qing* felt more acutely the pressures of censorship due to the more suspicious attitude toward the late Ming intellectual legacy on the part of many soul-searching literati thinkers of the early Qing. Some of these early Qing writers tried to uphold the status of *qing* by repositioning it in direct opposition to physical desire, while others tried to co-opt *yu* by proposing new ways to define *qing*. One of the solutions proposed was that if *yu* were indeed an object to be represented, it must be represented in terms of *qing*. That is to say, what is worthy of celebration is now sentiments of desire rather than desire itself, and *yu* needs to be sentimentalized. As far as specific strategies for valorizing *qing* are concerned, we have witnessed a process of change from an emphasis on the tension between *qing*

is used to refer to both emotional attachment and sexual desire. Another interesting feature of this work is its strong Buddhist suspicions about *qing*. Attempts to transcend *qing* (whether via a Taoist/Buddhist route as suggested in some of Tang Xianzu’s later works or other “philosophical” routes as proposed in Kong Shangren’s 孔尚仁 [1648-1718] famous play *Taohua shan* 桃花扇 [The Peach Blossom Fan]) are important aspects associated with the cult of *qing* during that time, which, however, are too complicated to deal with here. For discussions of this issue in the dramatic works of this period, see Wai-ye Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, pp. 64-88. However, I choose to concentrate here on these works of erotic fiction mainly because I believe that some of them, by virtue of their erotic details, effectively foreground the problematic relationship between *qing* and *yu*.

<sup>94</sup> Wai-ye Li’s discussions of *Honglou meng* (*Enchantment and Disenchantment*, pp. 152-256) are relevant to these issues, although their main focus is on what she has termed as “enchantment and disenchantment” and on the question of irony. Anthony Yu’s recent study *Rereading the Stone* also contains many interesting discussions of the issue of *qing* as explored in the novel, although it does not concentrate on the relationship between *qing* and *yu*. In fact, two other important eighteenth-century full-length novels, *Guwangyan* 姑妄言 (Words Said just for the Sake of Speaking) and *Yesou puyan* 野叟曝言 (The Humble Words of An Old

and *li* to that on the mutual accommodation between *qing* and *li*. This conservative trend became more visible in early Qing discourses on *qing* where it was often paired with *xing* rather than *li*, and they could be sometimes very “philosophical” and even “Neo-Confucian.” In a word, *qing* was tamed to a considerable degree by the time of the early eighteenth century. There were, however, serious and interesting attempts to reexamine *qing* during the eighteenth century when the legacy of late Ming had become *distant* enough for some of the mid-Qing writers to reflect more fruitfully on this particular issue. The search for “authentic” sentiments of desire continued during the eighteenth century, which, however, is a topic that has to be dealt with in a separate study.<sup>95</sup>

Rustic), which contain many explicit descriptions of sexual activity, share *Xiuping yuan*’s obsession with the issue of *qing* vs. *yu*, although their specific strategies and ideologies are very different. In these two works, erotic details are often confined to the descriptions of those characters of *yu*, who, in turn, are served as foils to the characters of *qing* (although there are instances in these works where such a clear-cut pattern of *qing* vs. *yu* is problematized). A careful reading of these two often neglected novels together with the famous *Honglou meng* should tell us a lot about how this issue of *qing* and *yu* was renegotiated in eighteenth-century fictional discourse.

<sup>95</sup> This essay is part of a large project on literary representations of *qing* and *yu* in late imperial China that the author is currently undertaking.



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# Ideology and Sexuality: Rape Laws in Qing China

VIVIEN W. NG

It is generally accepted that Qing China (1644–1912) was a straitlaced, sexually repressed society. Robert H. van Gulik, for example, ended his study of sexual life in China with the fall of the Ming dynasty, in part because he believed that Chinese attitudes toward sexuality became much more repressive after the Ming, and the generalizations he made in his book were not appropriate for the Qing (1961:333–36). This dramatic change in attitude has been attributed to the resurgence of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, with its strict view of sexual relations in general, and female sexuality in particular (Ropp 1981:120–24).

The Qing government actively sponsored the renewal of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism. Such “safe” values as filial piety, fraternal affection, female chastity, obedience and respect for elders were given the official stamp of approval and disseminated via a variety of means—government-funded schools, public lectures, and community drinking ceremonies. Conduct that conformed to these norms was publicly praised; conduct that violated these norms was publicly denounced (see Hsiao 1960:185–86).

The Qing Code, too, was employed as an instrument of social regulation. The structure of the Qing Code lent itself to manipulation. Its primary framework was made up of more than 400 statutes, the bulk of which were inherited from the earlier Ming Code. The statutes were supplemented by a body of laws called *substatutes*; these were ad hoc additions to the Code and were designed to provide flexibility to the whole legal system. During the Qing, the number of *substatutes* saw a fivefold increase (Bodde and Morris 1973:65–66).

The *substatutes* allowed the Qing Code to be both reactive and innovative. Many of the new *substatutes* were responses to new problems. For example, when opium smoking, a minor transgression in the seventeenth century, became a serious social problem in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it triggered a volley of legislative activities aimed at combating both the cultivation and consumption of opium (Spence 1975:143–73). Frequently, the *substatutes* themselves were amended, each amendment necessitated by the need to tackle conditions that were not accommodated or anticipated by the original *substatutes*. Not all Qing laws were reactive in nature. Some of them were legal innovations intended to effect social change. Laws that promoted morality, for example, belong to this category.

## The Qing Code and Rape Defined

In 1646 the Qing dynasty issued its first Qing Code. In the section on “Sexual Violations,” the Qing retained all eight of the Ming statutes on sex crimes; however,

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Vivien W. Ng is Assistant Professor of History and Women's Studies at the University of Oklahoma.



it added a modifier to the statute on forcible rape. In one stroke, the Qing government made it very difficult for women to prove that they were rape victims. For the crime of rape to be irrefutably established, the victim must provide evidence that she had struggled against her assailant *throughout* the entire ordeal. Such evidence must include: (1) witnesses, either eyewitnesses or people who had heard the victim's cry for help; (2) bruises and lacerations on her body; and (3) torn clothing. Moreover, when initially violence had been used, but subsequently the woman had submitted "voluntarily" to the act, the case was not considered rape, but one of "illicit intercourse by mutual consent," in which case the woman would be subject to punishment. Additionally, the modifier stipulated that, "when a man, having witnessed an illicit affair, proceeded to force himself on the woman, the incident could not be regarded as rape, because the woman was already a fornicator." In such a case, the episode would be considered one of "illicit sexual intercourse in which both parties intrigued to meet away from the woman's house," in which case the punishment for both parties could be 100 blows with a heavy bamboo (Xue 1970:1,080).

What motivated the Qing government to introduce such a stringent definition of rape, one that was so obviously prejudiced against the rape victim? It has been suggested that, because rape was often difficult to prove and consequently was frequently the subject of false accusation, solid evidence was required to substantiate the complaint. Thus, the stringent definition (Meijer 1981:289).

This explanation at first sight appears too convenient, presuming that many rape charges were indeed false accusations, a presumption that, incidentally, is still held today in this country by opponents of rape law reforms. In fact, the Qing government did try actively to discourage people from bringing false charges against others. There is ample evidence to suggest that one of the early concerns of the new dynasty was the large number of lawsuits, both legitimate complaints as well as false accusations, that were being brought before district magistrates. Top government officials considered this to be an undesirable development, because in their opinion litigation was a sign of social disharmony (*Shilu* 1937:juan 7, pp. 3a–4b). Several times during the first year of the Shunzhi reign, people living in newly pacified areas were exhorted to desist from unnecessary litigation. In fact, such urgings seemed to have become a necessary part of postpacification proclamations (*ibid.*:esp. *juan* 7 and 8). It is probable, therefore, that the stringent definition of rape was part of the *general* effort to discourage litigious tendencies among the populace.

Another worrisome problem for the Manchus was the fact that their bloody battles with the Ming loyalists, especially in Jiangnan, had undermined their efforts to present themselves as disciplined and peaceful conquerors. The regent, Dorgon, for example, was extremely sensitive to the need to cultivate the image of Manchu troops as restorers of order and not as marauding party of looters and rapists. Shortly after he entered Beijing in early June 1644, for example, he issued several proclamations to the Chinese people, urging them not to be fearful. He also ordered his officers to be careful not to disrupt the daily routine of the people (*Shilu* 1937:juan 8, pp. 2a–3b; 7b–8a).

Such reassurances and orders were necessary, because rumors about Manchu soldiers plundering Chinese towns and villages ran rampant in the wake of the Manchu takeover of Beijing (*Shilu* 1937:juan 8, pp. 2a–3b; 7b–8a). But, even if Manchu soldiers had been as disciplined as Dorgon had wanted them to be (they were not), given the chaos attending the Ming collapse and Manchu conquest, it was difficult for the general populace to distinguish the atrocities committed by marauding bandit

troops from the "mopping up" efforts of the Manchu conquerors. Even Ming loyalist forces suffered in the general confusion. As one eyewitness noted somewhat ruefully:

[E]verywhere soldiers and civilians are in conflict. On the soldiers' side, there is little discipline; on the citizens' side, of late they have been even more contrary. So it has become a standoff across city walls. The people take the soldiers to be bandits and will die before letting them in, while the soldiers see the people as refractory and attack them in cycles with no respite. If suddenly the [real] bandits should arrive, the people surely will be taken by surprise and run away [rather than defending their locales]. This truly is the greatest worry of the present day. (Struve 1984:24–25)

In other words, the populace tended to regard Manchu forces, Ming loyalist soldiers, and bandit gangs in the same, negative light. The bitter and fierce battles in Jiangnan had only reinforced the widespread fear the people held toward the Manchus.

Pacification required both subjugation of enemy forces and restoration of order and peace of mind. Thus, it was necessary, for example, for collaborating Ming officials to issue statements that served to further the image of the Manchus as civilized and well-behaved:

But for raising troops to beat bandits, stirring righteousness to come and rescue, driving out the bandits that our country abominates, avenging the hatred that would not let our former emperor rest in peace, washing away shame and expelling evil—in a thousand years of history has there been any like the Great [Qing]? . . . Since ancient times there never have been troops as humane and well-behaved, as peaceful in manner and civilly self-controlled as those of the Great [Qing]. (Struve 1984:58)

Lingering doubts about the Manchu conquerors had to be dispelled by whatever means available. Thus, the introduction of the stringent definition of rape in 1646 was probably part of the effort to discourage the Chinese from bringing rape charges against Manchu soldiers, because such accusations would only damage the pacification process.

Pacification of China also meant winning the cooperation of the literati. Toward this end, the Manchus presented themselves as restorers and guardians of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, which had been the state ideology of the Ming and which emphasized, among other things, obedience to authority, loyalty to superiors, and chastity for women. They had accurately gauged the prevalent sentiment among Chinese scholars that the collapse of the Ming was brought on by the Wang Yangming school of Neo-Confucianism, notable in its late Ming phase for its iconoclastic and hedonistic tendencies (Ropp 1981:40). Ming loyalists in the Jiangnan region, notably Jiading, had already begun their own efforts at Confucian renewal, emphasizing once again Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism (see Dennerline 1981). Intensification of state support for the cult of chastity was part of the Qing effort to sponsor their own Confucian renewal, in order to convert conservative Chinese scholars to the side of the Qing government. Herein lies another explanation for the stringent definition of rape, and one that I believe is the most likely.

### Ideology and Sexuality

At first glance, there seems to be a paradox. If indeed chastity were such a paramount virtue, why did the Qing government make it more difficult to establish rape? It would seem more logical for the government to enact laws that promised

swift and severe punishments for any man who forced himself upon a woman, whether violently or not. Is it possible that the main thrust of the new rape law was actually to ensure that women in Qing China would forcefully defend their chastity, even if it meant giving up their lives?

Such an interpretation, of course, would make the Qing rape law both misogynic and sadistic, but so was the cult of chastity. "It is a small matter to starve to death, but a serious matter to lose one's virtue" was only one of many aphorisms used to indoctrinate young women in Qing China. Often, a woman who found herself disgraced was impelled to commit suicide in order to redeem her good name and that of her family. Women were expected to be chaste even after being widowed, and widow remarriage was fiercely opposed by Neo-Confucian moralists. Lan Dingyuan (1680–1733), for example, included in his memoirs an account of the exploits of a gang of ruthless bandits whom he finally apprehended. Because he had earlier overheard gossip about the gang's attack on a newly wed couple, he decided to question them about the incident. He wanted particularly to see if they admitted to having stripped the woman of her clothes. Although the gang confessed readily to this and other crimes, they adamantly refuted Lan's accusation that they had defiled the good name of the woman. She was a remarried woman, they insisted. By marrying again, she had shown the world that she knew no shame. Lan commented: "Truly, a woman must never remarry. Even bandits understand this very well, let alone educated people who are well versed in the meaning of righteousness" (n.d.:75).

Neo-Confucian opposition to widow remarriage was further reinforced by the state, which erected memorial arches in honor of widows who had lived up to what society demanded of them (see Waltner 1981; Elvin 1984). The prestige accorded widows after decades of self-denial extracted a heavy price, and many widows found that they could not bear it. Suicide committed by widows was not uncommon in Ming-Qing China, and these suicides were lauded as supreme acts of loyalty, provided that the woman was childless (Spence 1984:esp. chap. 3). Widows with children were urged to persevere in spite of the hardship imposed on them by the cult of chastity.

Even those who glorified female chastity recognized how difficult chaste widowhood could be for the woman, and they perversely used that to encourage widow suicide. The compiler of the late Ming work, *Qingshi*, for example, commented at the end of one of his entries on chastity:

Life and death are all predestined; nothing is accidental. Some people say that a virtuous widow does not have to die—they may be right. But is death a thing which a person of infidelity can really comprehend? There was once a woman who was cited for her virtuous behavior as a widow. She lived till she was over eighty. Just before she died she summoned all her daughters-in-law and told them, "Only now do I know for sure that I have successfully escaped infidelity. But from now on, should our family again have the misfortune to have anyone widowed young, get her remarried immediately. Don't let her remain in widowhood—it is not easy to be a virtuous widow!" Thereupon she showed them her left hand. In the palm there was a huge scar—caused one night when she was still young as she was pounding on the table in an effort to restrain herself from a sudden lustful desire: she had punctured her hand by accidentally hitting the long metal spike of a candle stand. And her family had never even noticed it before! Would it not have been much better for her, while she was still passionately in love with her deceased husband, to have brought the beautiful situation to an end? (Mowry 1983:39–40)

The state-sponsored cult of chastity, which glorified chastity as a woman's paramount virtue and which insisted on a wife's absolute loyalty to her husband, un-

doubtedly accounted for the Qing insistence that rape victims resist their assailants throughout the entire ordeal, at the risk of losing their own lives; to do less would be most unchaste. Indeed, rape victims had no choice, because the rape law of 1646 made it clear that, if a woman stopped struggling and surrendered to her attacker, the case would not be considered rape, but "illicit intercourse by mutual consent." (The key formula-phrase used in the statute was, literally, "forcible beginning; amicable ending.")

The burden of proof rested primarily on the victim, and it was a heavy burden indeed. Due to the stiff evidential stipulations of the rape law of 1646, and the notion that a woman could give her consent during the course of sexual attack, nothing short of her death or, at the very least, serious physical injury could convince judicial officials of the veracity of her rape charge.

The cynical attitude of Qing officials is clearly evident in the seventeenth-century manual for local magistrates, *Fu-hui ch'uan-shu*, written by Huang Liuhong (first published in 1694). Regarding the subject of rape, Huang wrote:

Rape often occurs in isolated dwellings or lonely mountain passes where it is opportune to commit such a crime. Anticipating resistance, the offender usually brings with him a knife or other weapon to threaten the victim. During the struggle both parties are apt to have wounds on their faces or wrists. The woman's underclothes will be torn during her resistance as the offender forces her in haste. . . . There are instances when a fierce desperado commits flagrant rape by sheer brute force; the victim cannot resist his overwhelming strength or is tied up and gagged by the intruder. *But if the woman is chaste and decisive and prefers to die rather than be ravished* [italics mine], she will yell in spite of gagging. Would no one in the neighborhood come to her rescue when they heard her yelling for help? Those who come to help would see the scene and bear witness. . . .

However, if there is yelling at the beginning, but the noise suddenly stops as the neighbors begin to wonder about the commotion, this is probably a case of rape at the beginning, but the woman then acquiesces.

[W]hen a woman is confronted with a rapist and her reputation is at stake, she will disregard her safety and yell for help. When she is under duress, her hope of rescue constantly occupies her mind. Even after the rapist departs, her yelling and wailing will continue without interruption. *Despite the physical abuse, her intention of keeping her chastity prevails* [italics mine]. On the other hand, if a woman who is forced to perform a sexual act by an intruder protests with a loud noise, but [then] . . . changes her mind and acquiesces to the violence, it means that the woman has given her tacit consent to the rapist, and the case must be considered [illicit sex] by mutual consent rather than rape. The sitting magistrate should pronounce it a case of adultery by consent or a doubtful case in which the culprits are punished with reduced penalties. (1984:441-43)

Huang Liuhong's advice to his fellow magistrates shows vividly the manner in which the 1646 law could affect the handling of rape cases by Qing judicial officials. A magistrate who accepted completely and unquestioningly the letter of the law—as Huang so evidently did—could become a rape victim's worst enemy. Fortunately, not all Qing officials were as rigid as Huang; some of them were willing to give rape victims the benefit of the doubt. The following case (1859) serves as an example.

Bu Shouyong (a night watchman) and Jiang Shuangjie (the victim) were neighbors. One evening, before he went on duty, Bu asked his wife to invite Jiang over so the two women could keep each other company. Some time during the night, while he was patrolling the streets and calling out the time, Bu "remembered" that Jiang was spending the night at his place, and the mere thought of it stirred up an

immense desire in him for her. He abandoned his post to rush home, only to find that both his wife and Jiang were already fast asleep on the kang. Undeterred, he headed straight for the kang, flung open the blanket, and threw himself on top of Jiang. Jiang of course was shaken up but she still had enough wits to scream, thus waking up Bu's wife who also screamed and yelled at him. Bu picked up a piece of brick and warned the two to shut up or face the consequences. Having thus subdued the women, he had sex with Jiang, once.

The next morning, Jiang returned home. She confided in her mother about the incident, but, because it was a shameful matter, her mother admonished her to keep the whole affair secret. Some time later, Jiang and Bu's wife went to an outdoor performance together. In the middle of the program, Jiang decided to go home, and did so alone. Unfortunately, she ran into Bu on the way home. Because the memory of their previous encounter was still fresh in Bu's mind, he wanted desperately at that very moment to renew his "liaison" with her. He pulled her into an empty courtyard and tried to force her to have sex with him. He pushed her down on top of a pile of grass, held her down, and forced himself sexually on her. Jiang resisted with all her might. During the struggle, her clothing became torn. However, her effort was to no avail: Bu succeeded in pulling down her pants, raped her, and fled the scene of the crime. He was later arrested and brought to trial.

At the provincial-level trial, the governor-general found Bu obviously guilty of having illicit sexual relations with Jiang, but he did not think that Bu was guilty of rape. Regarding the first incident, the governor-general ruled that it was not rape. Although there was no question that Bu did force himself on Jiang, nevertheless, because Jiang did not repel his attack, it could only be concluded that the sex act was consummated with the woman's consent. Regarding the second incident, he reasoned that it happened because Bu chanced upon Jiang, an encounter that stirred in him lecherous thoughts. Although there was evidence of struggle on the woman's part (torn clothing), nevertheless, because the two had previously had sexual relations, it was impossible to regard the second incident as rape.

As for the issue of appropriate punishment for Bu, the governor-general was of the opinion that because Bu repeatedly had lecherous designs on Jiang and had indeed succeeded in having intercourse with her twice, he had behaved like a "bare-stick" (ruffian) and should therefore be punished accordingly. Using the established practice of sentence by analogy, he ruled that the case was similar in severity to "armed ruffians disturbing the peace," an offense that demanded a sentence of banishment to "a remote frontier 4,000 li away." He then forwarded the case to his superiors at the Board of Punishments in Beijing for routine review.

The officials at the Board of Punishments found fault with the governor-general on several points. The following is the board's line of reasoning: Bu invited a 15-year-old, unmarried maiden to his house to keep his wife company (it is only at this point in the transcript that the age and marital status of Jiang were made known). That fateful evening, when Jiang refused to submit to his advances, he picked up a piece of brick and threatened her, thereby succeeding in consummating the sex act. Jiang was obviously forced to have sex with Bu (that is to say, she yielded to the threat of violence); this was different from the formulaic situation, "forcible beginning; amicable ending." Later, when Bu wanted to renew the "affair" with Jiang, the woman resisted him forcefully; this only lent further proof to the fact that the first incident was not consummated with her consent. Moreover, it was evident that Bu had again used force in order to realize his aim. If indeed the first affair was consummated with Jiang's consent, why should there be the need for the use of force

the second time? It was clear that the crime committed by Bu was rape, not some lesser offense. The provincial officials had allowed themselves to be duped by the cunning words of a criminal! Additionally, in view of the fact that it was Bu's wife who extended the initial invitation, the possibility that she had acted in collusion with her husband should also have been investigated.

The provincial officials were directed to reopen the case. The board admonished them that rape cases must be carefully investigated, otherwise guilty rapists might be let off too lightly (*Xingan huilan xupian* 1970:4408–11). It is not known how the case was finally resolved, but given the tone of the Board of Punishments's directive, it is quite likely that Bu was ultimately found guilty of rape.

We see that, in this case, the victim's chastity was put on trial, and the disposition of the case depended heavily on the interpretation of her behavior by the presiding officials. As far as the governor-general was concerned, she did not show sufficient signs of having resisted her assailant vigorously. The fact that the man had threatened her with a piece of brick was discounted as sufficient cause for her to give in to his sexual assault. Once she had compromised herself by consenting to the first attack, the victim became an unchaste woman and, therefore, according to the governor-general's interpretation of the 1646 rape law, could no longer be regarded as a rape victim in the subsequent incident. Thus, her forceful resistance to her assailant's second rape attempt was rendered irrelevant in the disposition of the case.

Fortunately for the woman, the officials at the Board of Punishments were more sympathetic to her plight. Working with the same set of facts, the board officials exonerated the woman of any criminal responsibility—as far as they were concerned, she had put up sufficient (and therefore credible) struggle against her assailant. A rape victim's fate depended wholly on idiosyncratic interpretations of "chaste behavior."

The mother's advice to keep the first incident a secret was a sad commentary on Qing society's attitude toward rape and rape victims. Given the high value assigned to female chastity, it was not surprising that the older woman would want to spare her daughter and family further shame and dishonor. Given the harsh requirements for establishing rape, it was not surprising that she would not want to report the incident to the authorities, because failure to substantiate the rape charge would only add insult to injury. And, as the transcript shows, the provincial officials did not find her daughter credible. The older woman's instincts were sound.

One of the critics of the 1646 law was the late nineteenth-century legal scholar, Xue Yunsheng. He was especially critical of the notion that sexual assault could begin with force and end with mutual consent. He recognized that such a mistaken notion would only force victims of rape to commit suicide in order to prove their chastity. In his commentary on Qing laws, Xue included a lengthy excerpt from another work which in his opinion argued his case very succinctly:

[The *Lüli tiaobian* (A critical analysis of the law codes) puts it very well]: "There is mutual consent when both parties [enjoy the sexual encounter]. If the woman enjoys it, how is it possible that she can also hate it and, further, falsely accuses [her lover] of rape?"

"The person on whom sex was forced will surely insist that the incident was coercive throughout. Her assailant, on the other hand, will surely insist that the incident was consummated with the woman's consent. Whom should one believe?"

"Since the facts [in these cases] are so murky, the interrogator cannot help but be perplexed. Inevitably, he will come to regard only those cases in which the woman

committed suicide as forcible rape, and those in which the woman failed to kill herself as [illicit sex by mutual consent]." (1970:1080)

The introduction to the 1646 rape law of the notion of tacit consent suggests that Qing lawmakers believed that sexual assault could be pleasurable for the woman. Thus, when she stopped struggling, it was seen as a sign that she actually enjoyed the sexual encounter, and the whole incident acquired a different complexion. Instead of being treated as a victim of sexual assault, the woman was branded a fornicator and punished accordingly. She was liable to 80 blows with a heavy bamboo if she was not married and 90 blows if she was married. In other words, a woman's failure to defend her chastity vigorously was in effect made a punishable offense. The distinction made between married and unmarried women is also noteworthy. It suggests that perhaps loyalty to the husband was a higher virtue than even virginity. It also suggests that the property value of a Chinese woman as a daughter was less than that as a wife. For, whereas her father had sole *custody* of her sexual property while she was in his care, her husband had sole exclusive *use* of her sexuality while she was his wife. Violation of the right to exclusive use of sexual property was more serious than violation of sole custody, thus the difference in the sentences.

The rape law of 1646 reflected Chinese attitudes toward female sexuality. Like most other patriarchal societies, the Chinese held (and upheld) a two-sided archetype of women. One side was the chaste virgin/widow; the flip side, however, was that of the temptress, the fox-spirit.

The fox-spirit, in its female manifestation, is a common supernatural figure in Chinese folktales. The fox woman is typically extremely beautiful and seductive and loves to prey on unsuspecting young men who are novices in the matter of love and sex. The consequences of such liaisons are predictable—his vital essence gradually sapped by the fox woman, the young man grows progressively thinner and weaker until he is, quite literally, reduced to a ghost of his former self. Fox-possession tales are so universally known in China that, in the vernacular speech, seductresses are often referred to as "fox-spirits."

Chinese men probably regarded themselves as disadvantaged, vis-à-vis their women, as far as sexual enjoyment was concerned. While a man's yang essence was severely limited in quantity, the woman's yin essence was inexhaustible, which meant that she could be as sexually voracious as she liked without suffering any harmful consequences. And indeed, as the fox-possession tales suggest, the Chinese believed that women, when given the opportunity, would prey on men.

Small wonder, then, that Qing officials would demand stringent proof of rape—so as to be sure that the woman was not actually a jilted temptress—and would accept the idea that a rape victim could actually enjoy the sexual attack. Her latent voracious sexuality practically dictated that such was the case.

There is the danger, in the midst of this discussion, of losing sight of the fact that rape was a serious offense in Qing China. Once a case of sexual assault was firmly established as rape, the rapist was severely punished, and the punishment for the successful rape of an adult woman was strangulation. Huang Liuhong explains the reason for the death penalty:

Why does the statute provide a heavier penalty for rapists than any other sex offender? When a sexual act is forced on a woman, an innocent and chaste person suffers violence and dishonor under duress. The death penalty imposed on the rapist is a means of acclaiming the virtue of chastity and discouraging debauchery of womanhood. The heavy penalty is not designed simply to punish those who use force to satisfy their animal desire. (1984:438)

It was important that the victim was known to be an "innocent and chaste person," otherwise her assailant would not be subject to the death penalty. Although Qing lawmakers did not formulate a specific law to deal with the offense of sexual assault on "unchaste" women, the rape law of 1646 did provide a guide of sorts for the presiding judges. As noted above, the 1646 law stipulated that, when a man used the knowledge of an illicit affair to force himself on the woman, the assault could not be considered rape, "because the woman was already a fornicator." Instead, the incident would be regarded as "illicit intercourse in which both parties intrigued to meet away from the woman's house." In the 1859 case just presented, the governor-general rendered a very narrow interpretation of this stipulation and consequently ruled out the second incident as rape. Even when a sexual assault was ruled as rape, many judges (with the blessing of the Board of Punishments) would first make an issue of the victim's sexual history, and then proceed to downgrade the grievousness of the crime and reduce the sentence for the rapist by one degree, from strangulation to life exile (Xue 1970:1086). The following case (1820) provides an example.

A government runner by the name of Tian Wenxing took advantage of his position to extort the wife of a material witness. The frightened woman left her house to raise money to pay off Tian, leaving him alone with her youthful and attractive daughter, Zhao Ke'er. Seizing the opportunity that was thus presented him, Tian forced Ke'er against the kang, pulled down her pants, and raped her. When the case was brought to trial, the officials discovered that Ke'er had been having an illicit affair with another man, which made her an unchaste woman. This knowledge of the young woman's unsavory sexual history affected significantly the disposition of the case. Tian was sentenced to life exile instead of death by strangulation, which would have been his punishment had his victim been a "chaste" woman (*Xingan huilan* 1968:3255). When the crime of rape was downgraded simply because of the victim's sexual history, insult was added to the woman's injury. She was punished indirectly for her past behavior.

Rape was a capital offense because it was a violation of a woman's virtue. The price of chastity was very high indeed. It was worth at least one life—that of the rapist. Sometimes, it exacted two lives—that of the victim as well. The rape law of 1646 compelled women to defend their chastity with their lives, and those who did precisely that were honored by the state. However, until 1803, such honor was bestowed only on those who were murdered because they refused to give in to the rapist and those who committed suicide in order to escape being raped. Women who died *after* being subdued by the rapist were left off the honor roll. But in 1803, a Board of Rites official, Ji Yun, submitted a memorial to the Jiaqing emperor, requesting that this latter category of women be lauded as well. He argued that the desire of these women to protect their chastity was just as strong as that of women who gave up their lives in defense of their virtue. The fact that they were raped should not be counted against them, because it was not due to weakness of their will that they were subdued. Oftentimes, they were either outnumbered by their assailants or were simply overwhelmed by brute physical force.

Furthermore, Ji Yun wrote, "Let us take as an analogy the case of a loyal official who, in spite of his determination not to submit to bandit rule, nonetheless found himself captured, his hands tied behind his back, his feet bound with a piece of rope, and forced to kneel before the bandit leader. Would we say that he had surrendered to the bandit court? Of course not." Ji Yun's persuasive argument brought about a slight policy change. It was decreed that henceforth women who were attacked by *two or more* rapists and died as a consequence could be honored as chaste women, "in spite of the fact that they had been raped" (*Huangchao jingshi wenpian* 1963:2364).



More significantly, the Qing remained unwilling to absolve women who died *after* being raped by only one assailant. The attitude remained that a woman who was confronted by only one rapist should be able to defend her chastity successfully, even if it entailed getting herself killed in the process. It is also significant that, for a woman to be honored, she had to be dead. Women who survived their ordeal were utterly disgraced.

It is a well-established fact that the Qing government made every effort to systematize all known kinds of deviant acts and to provide punishments for all offenses. The crime of rape did not escape the legislative efforts of the Qing lawmakers. In addition to the straightforward crime of raping an adult woman, other categories include the following: (1) rape aggravated by injury; (2) rape of a young girl; (3) gang rape of a chaste woman; (4) gang rape of an unchaste woman; (5) attempted rape; (6) sexual intercourse with a young girl with her consent; and (7) male homosexual rape (Xue 1970:1082–86). With the exception of the statute for homosexual male rape, the other laws all served the purpose of, as Huang Liuhong put it, “acclaiming the virtue of chastity and discouraging debauchery of womanhood.” Thus, for example, the penalty for gang rape committed against a chaste woman was much more severe than that committed against a disreputable woman—immediate decapitation for the former offense and only banishment to a remote frontier region for the latter. The gang rape statutes in effect codified the practice employed by many judges in their disposition of “ordinary” rape cases, that is, downgrading the grievousness of offenses committed against unchaste women. Clearly, acclamation of the virtue of chastity meant also the devaluation of women whose conduct did not conform to the strict rules of Neo-Confucianism.

Because the punishment for the rapist depended so much on the reputation of his victim, Qing officials sometimes had to take great pains to investigate the personal history of the rape victims, so that the appropriate sentence could be meted out. For example, in 1849, the Shanxi department of the Board of Punishments considered the following gang rape case. Three Shanxi men—Wang Er, Ming Ju, and Er Zhao—were arrested for raping a singsong girl name Liu. She was brought up by her foster mother, who was herself an itinerant singer. After her marriage to another professional singer, Liu continued to polish her skills and to ply her trade. Liu’s upbringing and her profession situated her in a gray area as far as her ethical/moral status was concerned. The board officials made special note of the fact that, in spite of her profession, Liu had never been involved in an illicit affair. At the same time, however, they could not ignore the fact that she was an entertainer, which made her less than a “good” woman.

It was necessary for the officials to determine whether or not, for the purpose of this case, Liu could be regarded as a “good” woman, because according to Qing law, the punishment for the rapist depended very much on the victim’s moral makeup. For the crime of gang rape, the statutory sentence could be immediate decapitation or only banishment to a remote frontier, with the victim being the deciding factor. After giving the Qing Code a careful study, the officials pointed out that, before they could sentence the principal instigator, Wang Er, to death by immediate decapitation, they had to be satisfied that Liu was truly a woman of good repute. Conversely, before they could mete out the lesser sentence of banishment, they must be convinced that she did indeed have an unsavory history.

After much deliberation, the officials decided that Wang Er, the principle offender, definitely deserved to die for his crime, because he instigated the other two men to commit rape with him. However, they did not feel that they could give Wang

the maximum sentence of immediate decapitation, because the distinction between violating the body of a chaste woman and that of a disreputable woman must be maintained. In other words, even though the officials knew that Liu did not have an unsavory sexual past, they nonetheless found her less than reputable and proceeded to downgrade the punishment of her rapist from immediate decapitation to strangulation after the autumn assizes. The law they cited for the purpose of sentencing was the 1646 rape law, which stipulated death by strangulation for the convicted rapist.

As for the two accomplices, the officials ruled out the 1646 rape law as inappropriate, because if they sentenced Ming Ju and Er Zhao to death by strangulation, their punishment would be identical to that normally given to accomplices who took part in a gang rape against a chaste woman. Because they had already ruled that Liu was not exactly a "good" woman, the death penalty was out of the question. However, if they applied the standard formula to reduce the death sentence by one degree, the result would be exile to a location 3,000 li away, plus 100 blows with a heavy bamboo, a punishment that was identical to that normally given to accomplices who took part in a gang rape against an unchaste woman. This, too, was inappropriate, because Liu was not exactly unchaste! The only recourse, then, and one which the officials finally opted for, was to aggravate the exile sentence to banishment to Xinjiang where the two would serve as slaves to the garrison stationed there (*Xingan huilan xupian* 1970:4433–36).

### Homophobia in the Qing Dynasty

The subject of homosexual male rape was officially broached for the first time in 1679. A series of recommendations were subsequently forwarded, and a substitute for male rape was formulated in 1740. This basic law was later amended twice, in 1819 and 1852 (Xue 1970:1082). The Qing government was characteristically thorough. Once the decision was made to provide punishments for sexual assault on males by members of the same sex, Qing lawmakers proceeded to address every conceivable variation of the offense. The Qing male rape law, in its final form, included the following subcategories: (1) abduction and gang rape of an adult male; (2) rape and murder of an adult male; (3) successful rape of an adult male, aggravated by infliction of a nonfatal injury; (4) successful rape of an adult male; (5) successful rape of a boy under the age of 10; (6) successful rape of a boy between the ages of 10 and 12; (7) unsuccessful rape of an adult male, aggravated by infliction of a nonfatal injury; (8) unsuccessful rape of an adult male; (9) sodomy committed by consenting adult males; and (10) sexual intercourse with a boy between the ages of 10 and 12, with the boy's consent (*ibid.*, see Meijer 1985 for a translation of the full text of the substitute).

Most Qing substitutes were ad hoc responses to new situations and/or problematic cases, and it is instructive to consider the homosexual rape law in this light. The substitute addressed, in the first instance, the crime of abduction and gang rape of an adult male. It is probable that certain Qing officials, having encountered a number of cases involving abduction and rape of males by gangs, decided that the incidents justified the enactment of a new law. In other areas, for example, criminal insanity, Qing lawmakers overreacted, transforming isolated cases into epidemics that required immediate attention (see Ng 1980). Further research is needed, however, to determine if the male rape law was indeed another example of overreaction.

Whatever the circumstances that necessitated the formulation of the homosexual rape substitute, the government seems to have taken this opportunity to address the

problem of homosexuality as well. Buried in the statute is the “felonization” of male homosexuality, with sodomy (between consenting adults) being made a punishable offense. Was this a reflection of a more intolerant attitude toward male homosexuality? Might this proscription against a particular male sexual activity be considered the counterpart of the female cult of chastity? Perhaps van Gulik was correct in his assertion that Chinese attitudes toward sexuality in general became much more repressive after the Ming (1961:333–36).

The subject of male homosexuality in Qing China is still an unexplored realm. Clues provided by trial records (especially those dealing with male prostitution) suggest that male homosexuality was by no means uncommon. Barber stalls and bathhouses seemed to have been the usual fronts for male prostitution (see, for example, *Xingan huilan* 1968:3286, 3353–54). Perhaps this is because intimate physical contact between males was not unusual—and therefore seemingly innocuous—in either the barber stalls or bathhouses. Male homosexual activity was not confined to prostitution. I have come across cases involving the seduction of young boys or young men by their Confucian teachers, and seduction of neophytes by Buddhist monks (*ibid.*:3266, 3281; see also Meijer 1985).

Qing popular literature also suggests that male homosexuality was not uncommon. References to the practice can frequently be found in short stories and vignettes of the Qing period (see Hanan 1981:137–38, 167). The maverick playwright and drama critic, Li Yu (1611–1680?), had even written a short story on the subject of male homosexual marriage. This story, *Wusheng xi xiaoshuo di liu hui* (Silent Opera Number Six), was set in the southeastern province of Fujian, where homosexuality was supposedly so prevalent that a euphemism for male homosexuality was the “southern persuasion” (*nanfeng*). Even the native banyan trees seemed to display “homosexual” tendencies, for they tended to have their main trunks bend toward the lower, secondary trunks and the vines from both would become intertwined; thus they were given, appropriately, the nickname, “*nanfeng* tree” (Li 1970:5381–86).

It is obvious, then, that male homosexuality was not a newly discovered reality in the seventeenth century. But why did the Qing choose to criminalize this particular sexual orientation? One possible explanation, as suggested earlier, is that the state sponsorship of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, with its straitlaced view of sexuality, imposed a strict code of sexual behavior for men as well as for women—with homosexuality being the male version of female unchaste behavior.

I also believe that Qing homophobia is closely related to political trends. John Boswell’s study of homosexuality in Europe offers a scenario that is highly suggestive for the Qing. According to Boswell, the onset of homophobia in Europe in the late Middle Ages coincided with the rise of absolute government. Although a direct linkage cannot be made between homophobia and the growth of absolutism, it is clear that political developments played a large role in the narrowing of social tolerance in Europe. Boswell noted a push for intellectual and institutional uniformity: “Theology was fitted in systematic formulas and collected in comprehensive compendia—summas of such formulas. The Inquisition arose to eliminate theological loose ends and divergence of opinion. Secular knowledge was gathered into uniform approaches, encyclopedia, which attempted to unite all of contemporary learning into one book or system” (1980:270). Substitute philosophical orthodoxy for theology in Boswell’s account, and we have an apt description of early Qing intellectual and political developments (see Hsiao 1960; Goodrich 1966; Huang Pei 1974). Is it possible that the government regarded homosexuality as the ultimate form of heterodox, iconoclastic expression and, therefore, took steps to outlaw it?

A definitive explanation for Qing homophobia awaits further research on the subject. Official attitudes toward homosexual behavior, however, can easily be discerned. The following male rape case provides a glimpse.

In 1815 in the province of Shanxi, a case of male rape was brought to light. During the trial, it was discovered that the victim had had prior homosexual relations with another man. This revelation affected significantly the outcome of the trial. Although the rapist was convicted, his sentence was mitigated by one degree, from strangulation after the assizes to 100 blows and banishment. The reason given by the governor was that the victim, *in light of his sexual history*, could not be considered a “good” (*liang*) person; the crime, therefore, should not be considered as serious as the rape of a man who did not have prior homosexual experiences. Moreover, the victim was found guilty of having previously committed consensual sodomy and was given the statutory sentence for the offense (100 blows with a heavy bamboo plus wearing the cangue for one month). His previous sex partner would have been punished too, except that he was already deceased (*Xingan huilan* 1968:3266–67).

It is interesting to note that, although the rapist received a reduced sentence, he was still punished much more severely than a man who was found guilty of sexually assaulting an unchaste woman (100 blows plus banishment as opposed to just 100 blows). The “unchaste” male victim, too, paid a higher price. His unsavory sexual history having been uncovered, he was transformed from victim to villain and duly punished as a sodomite, receiving the sentence of 100 blows plus wearing a cangue for one month. His unchaste female counterpart, on the other hand, would receive, at worst, a relatively lighter sentence of 100 blows. More commonly, however, as pointed out earlier, her “punishment” was a devaluation of her worth as a woman.

The harsher punishment for the rapist in this case suggests that male homosexuality was being punished as well as the crime of rape. The harsher punishment for the unchaste male victim suggests that perhaps male homosexuality was regarded by the Qing government as a worse evil than female unchaste behavior. Iconoclastic men were more subversive to the state than immoral women.

### Concluding Remarks

The rape laws discussed in this essay illustrate the reactive and innovative aspects of the Qing Code. Both the rape statute and homosexual rape substatute were specific responses to specific challenges. Ultimately, however, they addressed more than these challenges; they also served to implement the realization of the Neo-Confucian social order. In the case of the 1646 statute, female virtue became a primary object, and the law was intended to help further promote the cult of chastity. In the case of the homosexual rape substatute, homosexuality itself became a primary concern, and the law imposed the stigma of criminality on unconventional sexual orientation and practices.

It is uncertain how successful these laws were as tools for social engineering. However, if nothing else, they served notice that unchaste behavior would not escape punishment, regardless of the circumstances.

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The Penetrated Male in Late Imperial China: Judicial Constructions and Social Stigma

Author(s): Matthew H. Sommer

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# *The Penetrated Male in Late Imperial China*

## **Judicial Constructions and Social Stigma**

Matthew H. Sommer

*University of Pennsylvania*

Sexual relations between men in the late imperial era should be seen, not as constitutive of a stable homosexual identity, but as acts that profoundly destabilized the gendered social hierarchy by treating some men (the penetrated) like women. Official anxiety about homosexual intercourse increased during the early eighteenth century, a time when fixed, heritable status differences eroded, while elite concern with gender performance intensified (Sommer, 1994; Mann, 1991). The result was a spate of new laws against sodomy (*ji jian*). Even so, the prohibition of sodomy predated the Qing dynasty and derived from long-standing perceptions by no means limited to official or elite circles.

The focus of the Qing code's section on "illicit sex" (*jian*) is heterosexual intercourse outside marriage; its basic aim, to control male access to females. There is no mystery why heterosexual acts would have concerned the Qing judiciary (or its predecessors): the defense of patriarchal marriage was part of the larger, venerable project of upholding familial order and social hierarchy as means to political order (Sommer, 1994).

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But why prohibit sex between men? Three scholars have tried to explain Qing laws against sodomy. According to Meijer (1985), consensual sex between males was not banned until the mid-Qing; in fact, its prohibition dates from the Ming dynasty, at latest. He also suggests that laws against sodomy were simply part of a consistent effort to ban all sexual activity outside marriage. But the Qing code does not ban sex between women—indeed, I find not a single mention, let alone prohibition, of female homosexual acts in any Qing or earlier legal source (not to mention other extra-marital practices familiar from the Western legal tradition, such as masturbation and bestiality).

Ng (1987, 1989) argues that Qing “homophobia” was part of an ideological campaign to gain the allegiance of the conservative Chinese elite. She also claims that the penalty for “male homosexuality” was more severe than that for “unchaste female behavior,” speculating that sex between men “was viewed as a direct challenge to the requirements of filial piety” because it could produce no sons (1989: 88-89). In fact, the penalty for consensual sodomy between adult males which she cites (100 blows of the heavy bamboo and a month in the cangue) was exactly the same as that for consensual heterosexual acts outside marriage (Sommer, 1994: 428).

Hinsch (1990) adopts the conclusions of Meijer and Ng, which suit his own theory of a “general tolerance toward homosexuality” up to the Qing dynasty, when “the new Manchu morality” induced the regime to prohibit consensual sex between men for the first time in Chinese history (1990: 4, 142). Neo-Confucianism and Westernization reinforced this bigotry, resulting in the homophobia of current Chinese regimes (1990: epilogue).

Hinsch offers valuable insights—for example, that age and status hierarchies tended to parallel the hierarchy of roles in anal intercourse. Nevertheless, as Furth points out (1991), Hinsch’s desire to recover a “tradition” to contrast with the homophobic present may obscure more than it reveals.<sup>1</sup> His notion of “imported Manchu concepts of sexuality” (1990: 162) also is questionable. Arguably, no one was more obsessed with defending Manchu values than the Qianlong emperor, yet he was widely reputed to enjoy erotic relations with males, as were the Xianfeng and Tongzhi emperors (Hinsch, 1990: 142-143). Manchu legal texts from the period prior to sinicization and conquest show no



bias against same-sex activity. Manchu tradition forbade sex in fewer contexts than did Ming law; the Qing founders even abandoned certain marriage customs to conform to Chinese incest taboos (Zhang and Guo, 1988: 485).

A further possibility, that desire for a member of the same sex was perceived as illness or perversion, has been ruled out by Furth's study of contemporary medical texts: "No kind of sex act or object of desire was singled out in medical literature as pathological" (1988: 6). Qing sodomy legislation was not a product of Foucault's "perverse implantation" (1978).

Meijer, Ng, and Hinsch all use "homosexual" to denote a male who had sex with males, and "homosexuality" to denote such activity and erotic attraction for members of the same sex generally. Such usage goes to the heart of a basic controversy in historical studies of sexuality, namely, whether sexual orientation today is primarily a biologically determined constant, independent of historical change, or primarily a modern social and cultural construct (Foucault, 1978; Stein, 1992).

To refer generally to "homosexuals" and "homosexuality" risks the anachronism of assuming that a fundamental *social* identity based on the sex of the person's object of desire has always and everywhere existed and been experienced in the same way.<sup>2</sup> In many societies, the sex of one's object of desire has yielded in priority to a hierarchical division between penetrant and penetrated.<sup>3</sup> In late imperial China, legal and literary texts strongly suggest that only penetrated males were perceived as "different"; desire for another male in and of itself seems to have carried little significance for popular attitudes and none at all for law. (In legal texts, homoerotic desire requires no special vocabulary, just the same clichés used to describe heterosexual lust—for example, *yin xin*.) This division of roles was understood to involve multiple hierarchies, especially that of gender, the model being heterosexual intercourse. Penetration of a male upset the proper hierarchy of gender, in which masculinity was defined by the penetrant role in intercourse, corresponding to the husband/father role in society.

Such a perspective conformed to an attitude widespread in Qing society, especially in settled peasant communities, which stigmatized the penetrated male. In reviewing Qing legal cases, it becomes clear

that there was a fundamental coherence between popular perceptions of homosexual relations and judicial standards. The judiciary sought to protect vulnerable masculinity as part of its larger agenda of upholding legitimate social hierarchy.

## LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

### BEFORE THE QING

Sexual relations between males, even when prohibited, were long treated as a category fundamentally different from *jian*, the standard term for “illicit sex” used in legal codes for two millennia. The classic definition of *jian* specified a heterosexual context: “a male and female engage in intercourse without basing it on a relationship of moral duty” (*nan nü bu yi yi jiao*) (Xue, 1990: 26/14b). The Qing jurist Xue Yunsheng confirms that anal intercourse between males “originally could not be judged according to the provisions on illicit sex” because “there is a great difference between [sex with] a male and [sex with] a female” (*nanzi yu funü da xiang xuan shu*) (the agent of action is presumed male). He does not elaborate on the exact nature of this difference (1970: 285-33).

Hence the classic purpose of legislation against *jian* had nothing to do with same-sex acts, regardless of whether they were considered crimes. But in the Qing, the definition of this legal term expanded: new laws assimilated homosexual offenses to heterosexual ones, labeled them a subcategory of *jian*, and included them in the *jian* section of the code. Underlying this shift, however, was a basic continuity: from the Song dynasty through the Qing, judicial interest in male homosexual acts consistently focused on phallic penetration of the anus, the division of sexual roles thereby implied, and the stigma of the penetrated male. This division of roles held far greater significance than that the object of desire was of the same sex. No other sexual act between men or disposition to perform such acts was ever singled out in legal discourse.

The earliest evidence of laws against homosexual relations in any form emphasizes the gender inversion attributed to the penetrated

male. Song sources report that a law of the Zhenghe era (1111-1118) punished "males who act as prostitutes" (*nan wei chang*) with 100 blows of the heavy bamboo and a fine of 50,000 cash, paid to whomever reported the culprit.<sup>4</sup> (*Chang* implied female gender; male prostitutes were referred to as *nan chang*—literally, "male prostitutes.") Another Song text mentions the prosecution of cross-dressing male prostitutes for the offense of *bu nan*—literally, "being not male" (Xue, 1970: 375-03; Wang, 1988: 226; Van Gulik, 1974: 163).

This fragmentary evidence suggests that Song lawmakers associated the penetrated role with cross-dressing and the debased legal status of prostitutes, and that they sought to punish males who consented to such degradation. (The texts do not mention the penetrant role, nor do they use *jian* to denote homosexual acts.) The apparent purpose of Song lawmakers was to fix boundaries: to prevent persons of commoner status (*liang min*) from being degraded by occupation to mean status (*jian min*—which included prostitutes) and to prevent males from being degraded by penetration or cross-dressing into females.<sup>5</sup>

The earliest statute explicitly banning sexual intercourse between males dates from the Jiajing reign (1522-1567) of the Ming dynasty. The Ming code's section on illicit sex includes no reference to such activity. Instead, the following measure adopted during the Jiajing reign appears in a supplementary set of "statutes applied by analogy" (*bi yin lü*), each of which cites a preexisting measure to be applied to offenses not covered in the code proper. (This supplement systematized the long-standing practice of judgment by analogy, so the punishment of male/male intercourse in this way may well predate its Jiajing codification.) The statute reads: "Whoever inserts his penis into another man's anus for lascivious play (*jiang shenjing fang ru ren fenmen nei yin xi*) shall receive 100 blows of the heavy bamboo, in application by analogy of the statute on 'pouring foul material into the mouth of another person' (*hui wu guan ru ren kou*)" (Xing tai falü: bi fu zafan zui lü/48b; Xue, 1970: 285-33).

This statute contrasts sharply with those against heterosexual offenses found in the section on illicit sexual activity of the Ming code. First, it could hardly be more explicit about the act being punished—far more so than the illicit sex statutes, which use *jian* to stress

extramarital context without reference to specific gestures or anatomy. The statute quoted above never mentions jian at all, let alone the Qing legal term for sodomy, *ji jian*.

Second, the statute does not employ the dichotomy of “coercion” (*qiang*) and “consent” (*he*) used to define sexual offenses in Chinese legal codes since antiquity. While the analogy to assault might seem to imply the punishment of rape, the only example I have found of this law’s use in practice (from the Qing) involves the punishment of a man who had *consented* to being penetrated (Chang Wejen, 1986: 40-73). Ming lawmakers may simply have assumed it impossible to rape a male—an assumption that continued, with some qualification, to inform legislation during the Qing (see below). At any rate, the penalty (100 blows of the heavy bamboo) approximated contemporary penalties for consensual heterosexual offenses (80 to 100 blows); it was far less severe than that for heterosexual rape (strangulation) (Xue, 1970: 366-00).

The most significant feature of the statute is its analogy between anal penetration and a crime listed in the “fighting” (*dou ou*) section of the Ming code: “pouring foul material into the mouth of another person” (Xue, 1970: 302-00). Lawmakers evidently found this a more exact analogy than any of the heterosexual offenses in the illicit sex section, implying that penetration was an assault, with subject acting upon object.

But the fighting section lists dozens of crimes, so this particular choice begs analysis. It contains three key elements: penetration, “foul material,” and targeting the mouth. Such assault could surely cause physical injury. But “foul material” suggests pollution and humiliation more than physical danger; also, most cultures associate the head and face with personal dignity (another clause of the same fighting statute punishes “whoever pollutes the head or face of another person with foul material”). In other words, pollution and humiliation were more important than battery to defining the crime of anal penetration. Moreover, such harm clearly affected the penetrated person only: *being* penetrated corresponded to having foul material poured into one’s mouth. The stigma would stain the penetrant no more than foul material would sully one who poured it.

## EARLY QING LAW: THE TRANSITIONAL PHASE

Like most Ming laws, the "statutes applied by analogy" were adopted into the first edition of the Qing code in 1646.<sup>6</sup> Thereafter, as new statutes were added, many "statutes applied by analogy" became obsolete and were eliminated (Xue, 1970: 52/bi yin lü). Xue Yunsheng reports that the one on anal intercourse was applied during the Kangxi reign (1662-1723); it remained on the books until 1725 (Xue, 1970: 285-33; Wu, 1992: 1141-1144).

As early as 1655, however, Qing courts began using the term *ji jian*—"sodomy"—to refer to homosexual anal intercourse (Chang Wejen, 1986: 23-85). In 1679, legislation against *ji jian* appeared for the first time, in the illicit sex (*jian*) section of the code. By the end of the Yongzheng reign (1723-1736), the code contained substantial legislation on the subject. This legislation represented a break with earlier practice, in that homosexual intercourse was for the first time directly assimilated to heterosexual offenses under the rubric of "illicit sex."

The origins of the term *ji jian* are not clear. In Qing legal sources, a logograph meaning "chicken" is used to represent the sound *ji*. This usage appears to be a later substitution for an obscure logograph, also pronounced *ji*, which, according to the late Ming scholar Yang Shiwei, meant "to use a male as a female" (*jiang nan zuo nü*) (Higashikawa, 1979: 295; Ci hai, 1978: 1/827).<sup>7</sup> The construction of this obscure logograph is suggestive: the lower half of the logograph *nan*, meaning "male," has been replaced by the logograph *nü*, meaning "female" (see Glossary). The essence of the term is the gender inversion imposed on a male who is anally penetrated, as implied by Yang Shiwei's definition and by the logograph's construction.<sup>8</sup>

The 1679 statute marked the first appearance of *ji jian* in the code itself: "If evil rascals gather in a gang and abduct a young man of good family and use coercion to sodomize him, then the ringleader shall be immediately beheaded, and the followers shall all be sentenced to strangulation after the assizes. If it is consensual (*he tong zhe*), then the crime shall be punished according to statute" (Qing huidian shili: 990).

In 1696, the following amendment was added: "If degenerate evil characters abduct a young man of good character and use coercion to sodomize him, then the followers shall be sentenced to strangulation after the assizes, and they shall not be granted clemency under any amnesty. If it is consensual, then the crime shall be punished in the usual way" (Qing huidian shili: 825/990).

This measure introduces the dichotomy of "coercion" and "consent" to divide the newly named crime into the traditional subcategories of illicit sex. It specifically addresses gang rape, but its penalties could also apply to a rapist who acted alone, at least in extreme cases. In a 1733 example from Guangdong, Yu Zidai (fifty-seven sui) lured Chen Amai (sixteen sui) into a sugarcane field, raped him, and beat him to death.<sup>9</sup> Yu was sentenced as follows: "Yu Zidai did not gather a gang, but nevertheless, he did lure Chen Amai away and raped (*qiang jian*) him; in addition, he killed him immediately afterwards. This is lecherous evil in the extreme! Yu Zidai should be beheaded immediately, according to the statute's provision on 'ringleaders' " (Chang Wejen, 1986: 41-7).

The 1679 statute also confirms that "consensual" sodomy should be punished "according to statute," or as the amendment adds, "in the usual way." This language refers to the Ming "statute applied by analogy": the 1679 law added new penalties for rape but confirmed the old analogy's application to consensual acts.

We see an example of the latter in a 1724 homicide case from Fujian involving three soldiers: Tu Lian (thirty-six sui) had had a sexual relationship with Zheng Qi (early twenties) for four years (Tu penetrating Zheng), and they shared a bed; their roommate, Wu Zongwu (twenty-four sui), slept separately. One night while Tu Lian was out, Wu was bothered by mosquitoes, so he crawled in bed with Zheng, who had a mosquito net. When Tu returned, he killed Wu in a jealous rage. Tu Lian was convicted of "purposeful homicide"; more pertinent is the judgment of his lover:

Zheng Qi allowed Tu Lian to sodomize him; we find that the code contains only penalties which uniformly apply to males and females who engage in illicit sexual intercourse; it contains no standard provision prescribing penalties for two males who engage in sodomy. Therefore, Zheng Qi shall be sentenced according to the supplementary statute applied by analogy, which provides that "whoever inserts his

penis into another man's anus for lascivious play shall receive 100 blows of the heavy bamboo, in application by analogy of the statute on 'pouring foul material into the mouth of another person.' "

This judgment, approved by imperial rescript, shows that the Ming statute might punish not only penetrants but also any male shameless enough to submit to sodomy. Its language reflects the point of transition at which it was written: the sexual activity is called "sodomy" and compared to the "illicit sexual intercourse" of "males and females." But there existed as yet no measure on illicit sexual intercourse by which to judge a consensual homosexual offense, so the old Ming analogy had to be used (Chang Wejen, 1986: 40-73).

#### THE ASSIMILATION OF SODOMY TO ILLICIT SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

Earlier measures were superseded in 1734 by a substature in the illicit sexual intercourse section, which remained in force until the early twentieth century (see Appendix A). This law (together with complementary measures that followed) achieved a precise assimilation of sodomy to heterosexual *jian*. The breakdown into specific offenses paralleled preexisting categories of illicit sex; moreover, the penalties for sodomy now equaled in almost every detail those for corresponding heterosexual offenses. The correspondence is too exact to have been accidental.

Gang rape of a person of either sex was punished according to the substature on "rootless rascals" (*guang gun*), ringleaders by immediate beheading and followers by strangulation after the assizes. Rape by one offender of a person of either sex over twelve sui was punished by strangulation after the assizes; rape of a child of either sex between ten and twelve sui, by beheading after the assizes; rape of a child under ten sui, by immediate beheading.

Rape of a person over twelve sui of either sex that was "not accomplished" (*wei cheng*—i.e., the vagina or anus was not penetrated) was punished by 100 blows of the heavy bamboo and life exile at 3,000 *li*. If the victim were twelve sui or under, the offender was enslaved to the military forces in Heilongjiang.

"Consensual" sex with a child aged twelve sui or under of either sex was automatically treated as coercive and punished by strangula-

tion after the assizes. Consensual sex with a person over twelve sui of either sex was punished according to the substature on "soldiers or civilians engaging in illicit sex" (*jun min xiang jian*), by 100 blows of the heavy bamboo and one month in the cangue.<sup>10</sup> Prostitution by male or female, as well as sex with a prostitute, received the same penalty.<sup>11</sup>

After 1734, any sodomy offense not covered in the code was judged by precise analogy to the corresponding heterosexual offense. For example, in an 1833 case from Beijing, Du Zhuer (thirty sui) penetrated his half-brother (same mother, different father) Fan Erge (eleven sui). The code did not treat incest between males, so Du was sentenced by analogy to the substature on "illicit sex with a sister by the same mother but a different father"; because of Erge's youth, the penalty was increased by one degree (*Xing Bu dang*: 06194).

In a complementary process, the legal discourse of sodomy adopted key terms and standards long used in the prosecution of heterosexual offenses, especially rape. During the Ming-Qing period, certain factors disqualified a woman from full treatment as a rape victim by automatically indicating lighter penalties for her rapist (Sommer, 1994; Ng, 1987). This weighting of penalties shows that the law did not define rape from the victim's point of view, but rather in terms of a loss of status inflicted on the victim by the experience of forced penetration outside a legitimate context.

If the victim had previously engaged in illicit sex, then the damage caused by the rape was measurably less, since the chastity at stake had already been polluted; the lighter penalty for the rapist reflected this prior pollution. The same was true if the hierarchy of penetration somehow conformed to the relative status of rapist and victim: a master crossing status lines downwards to rape a servant, or a commoner raping a person of mean status, would receive lighter penalties, in the unlikely event of prosecution, than if they violated status equals. (On the other hand, extra penalties applied to any male who crossed status lines upwards by penetrating a female of higher status—e.g., a woman of his master's household.) This formal matching of status to sexual role is one of the clearest expressions in Chinese law of the gendered hierarchy of penetration.

After the assimilation of homosexual offenses to heterosexual ones, the same logic framed the evaluation of the male rape victim. The 1679 and 1734 laws characterize the penetrated male as a *liang ren zi di*. In



this phrase, *liang* carries the double meaning of sexual virtue and commoner legal status, so that precise translation is awkward: "a son or younger brother of good character/of a commoner." Such a characterization matches closely that of the ideal female victim of rape or abduction as *liang jia fu nü*—"a wife or daughter of good character/commoner family"—or *liang ren fu nü*—"a wife or daughter of good character/of a commoner" (e.g., Xue, 1970: 366-02).

In this way, standards for evaluating female chastity and defining legitimate access to women were adapted to measure the loss suffered by a penetrated male. Below, we examine how these standards applied in practice to cases of homosexual rape. But Qing jurists never imagined men to be exactly the same as women. As we see, the exact parallel between homosexual and heterosexual offenses broke down over the question of resistance to rape. The difference between the plausibly rapable male and female articulates most clearly the Qing judicial construction of sex between men.

### EVALUATING THE PENETRATED MALE

#### RELATIVE LEGAL STATUS: MASTERS AND SERVANTS

No measure in the Qing code addresses the issue of homosexual relations between masters and servants, slaves, or hired laborers. Seventeenth century novels like *The Plum in the Golden Vase* (*Jin ping mei*) and *The Carnal Prayer Mat* (*Rou pu tuan*) suggest that homosexual intercourse (master penetrating servant) was not uncommon; like intercourse with female servants, it was unlikely to be prosecuted, regardless of the degree of coercion involved.

In 1798, however, the governor of Shandong memorialized about a case he found difficult to judge. A landlord named Pan Junting had attempted to rape his male hired laborer (*gu gong*) of two years, Shao Xing. Resisting, Shao had kicked his master in the testicles with such violence that Pan died. The problem was how to balance the statute that mandated leniency for "males who commit homicide while resisting rape" (see Appendix B) with the vital principle of maintaining household hierarchy. In this case, had the men been social equals, it is most likely that Shao's penalty would have been strangulation

after the assizes for the "unauthorized killing of a criminal," with the certainty of eventual reprieve. But for a long-term hired laborer to kill his master was a heinous violation of Qing law—if the homicide resulted from fighting, then even if it was unintentional, the laborer would be beheaded immediately (Xue, 1970: 314-00).

The governor recommended leniency and the Board of Punishment severity, so the emperor struck a balance. The final judgment confirmed that Shao's master had been trying to rape him; nevertheless,

for a hired laborer to kick his master to death holds the gravest implications for the principle of status difference. . . . It is inappropriate to judge this case according to the substatute on "committing homicide while resisting rape," which applies to status equals (*chang ren*), so that the offender would be sentenced [merely] to strangulation after the assizes; such a sentence would show reckless indulgence.

Therefore, Shao received the more severe sentence of beheading, with the qualification "after the assizes," keeping open the possibility of a reprieve (Xing an hui lan: 53/16a-17a). Although Shao's sentence was more severe than it would have been had the two men been social equals, it was much lighter than if his master had not been trying to rape him. This judgment parallels that of a 1738 case from Zhili, in which a male servant used violence to defend his sister-in-law against rape by their master (Sommer, 1994: 47).

#### LIANG AS COMMONER LEGAL STATUS

Prostitutes, male or female, violated the standard of liang in both senses of the word. As an occupational group, they, like other entertainers, possessed the despised legal status of mean persons, being excluded from the ranks of commoners. At the same time, prostitutes could not be considered liang in the sense of virtue: penetration outside marriage disqualified a female, while *any* experience of being penetrated disqualified a male.

But what if a male rape victim were liang in one sense, but not in the other? In 1824, the governor of Shaanxi memorialized on a case in which Zhang Laijia and Wang Deyu, who were armed with knives and clubs, waylaid and raped Wang Ke'er and another man on a road (each attacker raped one victim). The case was complicated by the fact

that the victims were both actors who performed female roles (*xiao dan*), and therefore, the governor argued, "they cannot be treated as 'young men of good character/commoner status,' " as would be required for the rapists to receive the full penalty for coercive sodomy (strangulation after the assizes). But such a vicious crime could not go unpunished. The solution, approved by imperial rescript, was to reduce the full penalty one degree, to 100 blows of the heavy bamboo and life exile at a distance of 3,000 li.

There was no evidence that either victim had previously been penetrated by another man, so they could be considered *liang* in terms of sexual virtue at the time of the rape. But their occupation clearly debased their legal status, so they could not be considered *liang* in the sense of being commoners. Moreover, as female impersonators, these men already embodied the gender inversion suffered by a victim of anal penetration. The judgment, therefore, balanced the principle of legal status hierarchy against that of punishing rape—exactly mirroring the sort of compromise made when a chaste (*liang*) woman of mean legal status (not *liang*) was raped by a commoner (Xu zeng xing an hui lan: 14/2a-b; Sommer, 1994: 59-61).

#### LIANG AS SEXUAL VIRTUE IN MALES

Any previous experience of penetration disqualified a male from being considered *liang* in the sense of sexual virtue. Therefore, like debased status (absolute or relative), such experience was also judged to lessen the harm caused by rape, indicating a reduced penalty for the rapist. This was the logic used to evaluate an unchaste woman who had been raped.

In a case reported by the governor of Shanxi in 1815, Guo Zhengqi had been raped by Li Lengsan, but admitted that earlier he had already consented to being "sexually polluted" (*jian wu*) by another man. As the governor reasoned, "There is a difference between [Guo] and 'a man of good character' (*yu liang ren you jian*). Therefore, Li Lengsan should be sentenced to 100 blows of the heavy bamboo and life exile at a distance of 3,000 li, a reduction by one degree from the penalty of strangulation after the assizes that is prescribed by the statute for 'committing coercive sodomy without injuring the victim.' " In other words, if a man were shameless enough to consent to being

penetrated, the harm he might suffer by being raped could not be great enough to warrant the death penalty for the rapist. Moreover, for his earlier consensual penetration, Guo himself received 100 blows of the heavy bamboo and one month in the cangue, according to the provision against "consenting to be sodomized" (*he tong ji jian*) (Xing an hui lan: 52/7b-8a).<sup>12</sup>

#### HOMICIDE IN THE COURSE OF ATTEMPTED RAPE

Previous experience of penetration could affect homicide judgments, too, as seen in a 1762 case from Zhili. In 1751, the widow Ma Shi had hired an unmarried, landless peasant, Lin Ermengdong (twenty sui), to help her orphaned grandson, Li Changzuo (ten sui), work their land in exchange for 60 percent of the harvest. During crop-watching, Lin and Li shared a hut in the fields, and Lin began penetrating the boy, in a friendly relationship that lasted several years.

In 1758, when Lin and Li were twenty-seven sui and seventeen sui, respectively, they became the subject of village gossip, and the younger man broke off both the sexual and work relationships. But one evening in 1761, Lin encountered Li and propositioned him. As Lin later confessed, Li rejected him, saying: "Before, we were seen screwing around together (*zan liangge gan de goudang*) . . . and the whole village talked until it was unbearable. Who would want to do that shameful thing with you again?" A quarrel ensued, and Lin beat his former lover to death.

In evaluating this homicide, the magistrate first considered a clause of the 1734 sodomy statute: "Whoever murders a young man of good character in the course of an attempt at illicit sex . . . shall also be immediately beheaded according to the statute on 'ringleaders of rootless rascals' " (see Appendix A). Upon reflection, he rejected this measure, reasoning that "Li Changzuo had previously submitted to illicit sex with Lin Ermengdong, so Lin Ermengdong cannot be compared to someone who schemes to sodomize and murders 'a young man of good character.' " Accordingly, he sentenced Lin to the lesser penalty of beheading after the assizes, which kept open the possibility of reprieve (Xingke tiben: 173/QL 27.3.18).<sup>13</sup>

Evidently, homosexual rape was defined from the victim's perspective no more than heterosexual rape. In judicial discourse, being

penetrated involved a stigmatized loss of status for males; this loss to a certain extent corresponded to a woman's loss of chastity, and its effects were measured in similar ways by the penal system. Males of debased status and males who had already been penetrated did not suffer the full degree of harm when raped; it followed that their rapists did not deserve the full penalties mandated by law.

However, there remained fundamental differences between the loss suffered by a penetrated male and a female's loss of chastity. By definition, a woman was legitimately penetrable—but she had to reserve that penetrability for her husband. The chastity promoted by the Qing state was at root a form of loyalty, explicitly associated with political allegiance (like filial piety). An adulteress offended against her husband, so the burden on the female rape victim was to prove that she had not committed a betrayal. This interpretation was reflected in the penalty for consensual illicit sexual intercourse, identical for heterosexual and homosexual couples except for one significant detail: Ming-Qing law provided that a wife convicted of adultery could be “sold in marriage” by her husband (Xue, 1970: 366-00).

No comparable measure applied to a male who engaged in illicit relations with a woman or played either sexual role with another male. The Qing state orchestrated no cult of virtuous males who died guarding their penetrability to correspond to the female chastity martyrs canonized on a regular basis. Males were not expected to be weak, fatalistic, or suicidal; theirs was not to reserve themselves as vessels for one legitimate master. They were not supposed to be penetrable at all, but rather penetrants, subjects rather than objects of action.

Yet Qing law acknowledged that males could be raped and that they might consent to sodomy. But for this penetrability to make sense, the male had to be somehow less than male. To grasp this unstable masculinity, let us turn to the standards of evidence for homosexual rape. What sort of male did the judiciary imagine as a credible rape victim?

#### *COERCION, YOUTH, AND POWERLESSNESS*

Unlike the Qing code's original statute on heterosexual illicit sex (Xue, 1970: 366-00), the sodomy statutes do not spell out an exact

standard of evidence for coercion. Case records show that the standard long established for the rape of a female was generally applied, but with some notable modifications.

A woman was expected to defend her chastity to the death; otherwise, she bore the burden of proof that she had been overpowered in spite of fierce resistance. Persuasive evidence included a confession from the rapist, injuries, torn clothing, threat with a weapon, and witnesses who confirmed her resistance. It was best if she had been violated within her proper domestic space, and she needed the full support of patriarchal guardians in order to file charges.

When a male alleged that he had been raped, some of the same kinds of evidence were required: case records cite torn and bloodstained clothing, and judges asked if victims had cried out and struggled. Even so, the male rape victim was imagined as fundamentally different. The issue of domestic space, for example, never comes up in cases of homosexual rape: it was perfectly legitimate for men and even young boys to be outside the home for a wide variety of reasons. Indeed, case records show that it was common for unrelated men to share beds at night, a practice which did not necessarily imply sexual activity.

The crucial distinction in the prosecution of heterosexual versus homosexual rape is that judges saw men as fundamentally powerful, whereas women were assumed to be weak. Of course, a woman should resist, but her strongest evidence of coercion was that she had been killed or had committed suicide; barring death, serious injury was the best defense. These were decidedly weapons of the weak.

In contrast, the judiciary was highly skeptical that a man could be raped at all: if sodomy had been accomplished upon an adult male, then it must have been consensual. Only a powerless male could be penetrated against his will—and the most unambiguous form of male powerlessness was youth. The statutory language specifies the male rape victim as a *liang ren zi di*; I have translated this as “a young man of good character/commoner status,” but the literal meaning of *zi di* is “son or younger brother.” Such phrasing implies that the male rape victim was a young, junior member of a family unit. The corresponding phrase for the female rape victim is “a wife or daughter of good family.” “Daughter” implies youth, to be sure, but “wife” does not;

the emphasis here is gender subordination within the family, not youth. (The phrase for males says nothing about husbands.)

Indeed, the victim's youth and family seem to have been crucial factors in the prosecution of homosexual rape. In archival records that I have seen of homosexual rape cases (not involving homicide), the oldest victim was fourteen sui; every case was reported to the authorities by a parent of the victim. Every archival case record I have seen of attempted rape of an *adult* male by a single attacker ended up in court because one of the men killed the other. That does not mean adult males were never raped, but rather that there existed a judicial bias against accepting an adult male as a rape victim.

Even with an adolescent victim, judges might exhibit great skepticism about whether coercion had truly been used to accomplish sodomy. In an 1851 case from Zhili, the victim was Chen Shang'er (fourteen sui), a peasant who worked on the village watch with three older men; one of the other men, Han Yunrui (fifty-two sui), was an ex-convict recently released after several years of internal exile. One night when the others were out on duty, Han raped Chen Shang'er. The boy's father reported the rape, and forensic examination established that Shang'er's anus had been penetrated. Arrested, Han confessed. The magistrate recommended strangulation after the assizes for "forcibly sodomizing a young man of good character, without injury"; but the provincial judge of Zhili overturned the judgment for the following reasons:

In cases of "accomplished rape," if violent coercion has truly been employed, then the rape victim should exhibit physical injuries from the struggle. . . . In this case, *Chen Shang'er is already 14 sui, and absolutely cannot be considered a child*. When Han Yunrui pulled at his pants and he was startled awake, *it should not have been difficult for him to escape immediately; why is it that all he could do was weep and cry out?* . . . He did not struggle vigorously, and thereby allowed himself to be sexually polluted. Moreover, [the other watchmen] must have been in the vicinity; how is it that they heard nothing when Chen Shang'er was being sodomized and cried out? In addition, . . . his body exhibited not even the slightest injury. [emphasis added]

Here, the provincial judge cited the standard of evidence for rape applied to women in Ming-Qing law, but his emphasis of the boy's

age did not figure in this way when the victim was female. He ordered the case retried to establish beyond doubt whether coercion had been used (Shuntian fu dang'an: 167/XF 1.2.6).

The clearest expression of judicial skepticism came in the prosecution of men who committed homicide in self-defense, they claimed, against rape. Most cases involved the use of a knife or other edged weapon to kill the alleged rapist. Qing judges deemed it so unlikely that a teenage male would have to resort to such a weapon to prevent rape that they treated any such claim with great suspicion, assuming the claim was a lie that obscured the true motive for murder.

Still, Qing law sometimes granted leniency to males who committed homicide while resisting rape. Until the late eighteenth century, the procedure was for the provincial governor reporting the case to recommend formally that the prisoner be executed according to the relevant homicide statute, but to add an explanation of the mitigating circumstances, with a suggestion that the sentence be commuted. The final decision would be made at the palace (Wu, 1992: 785).

But the age of the killer (i.e., the alleged victim of sexual assault) was key to whether leniency would be granted. In a 1744 case from Zhili, a man named Ma Zhongxiao used an ax to kill one Wu Guodong, with whom he was sharing a bed, and who he claimed was trying to rape him. The governor-general recommended leniency, but the palace refused: "If Ma Zhongxiao was already 20 sui, then he was a strong man in the prime of life. How could Wu Guodong possibly coerce him into sodomy?"

So the case was sent back to the local magistrate for retrial. When pressed about his age and strength, Ma testified, "I was only 19 sui, and I have always been weak. He was a very strong man, and when I was held tightly by him, there was no way I could struggle free." The magistrate reported:

According to the offender, he was only 19 sui at the time, and although that is not so young, the offender is not really very strong either. This humble official personally examined the offender in court, and it was obvious that his constitution is not tough or strong at all. Moreover, Wu Guodong was more than twice the offender's age, and it seems credible that he could have sought to use coercion to sodomize him, taking advantage of his youthful weakness.



The governor-general then personally inspected the prisoner, drew the same conclusion, and confirmed his original recommendation to the palace (Chang Wejen, 1986: 133-99).

A degree of leniency toward males who committed homicide while resisting rape was codified in the late eighteenth century, but in addition to unimpeachable evidence of a rape attempt, any offender to be granted leniency had to meet strict qualifications based on age. A statute of 1783 specified that for a reduction of penalty to be considered, it was necessary for "the dead man to be at least 10 sui older than his killer"; furthermore, "if the dead man and his killer are of the same age, or if the dead man is only a few sui older," then the case should be judged according to the basic homicide statutes without any reduction of penalty. Twelve years later, an amendment granted that even if the dead man were "not quite 10 sui older than his killer," but strict evidential requirements were met, then a reduced sentence could apply. In 1823, a final measure absolved boys of fifteen sui or under of any penalty for killing men at least ten sui older who tried to rape them, as long as strict evidential requirements could be met; if the evidence did not quite meet the strict standard of the statute, but authorities were persuaded the boy was resisting rape, then he would receive a nominal sentence to be commuted to a fine (see Appendix B; *Qing huidian shili*: 801/769).

The intent of this legislation was to prevent murderers from escaping with penalties lighter than they deserved (Wu Tan, 1992: 785; Meijer, 1985: 124-126). However, by spelling out the narrow circumstances that partly excused such homicide, the judiciary also articulated its image of a plausibly rapable male. Only a boy or a young, weak man attacked by someone older and more powerful might be successfully raped, and therefore might be excused for resorting to an equalizing weapon like a knife in self-defense.

No such equation of youth with powerlessness appears in the elaborate judicial discourse on heterosexual rape. Any woman who immediately killed a man attempting to rape her was excused punishment; the code mentions no qualification based on age (Xue, 1970: 285-20). Among males, only those fifteen sui and under could be granted such complete clemency, and only if they were at least ten sui

younger than their attackers and could meet an unusually strict standard of evidence (including confession of the rapist prior to death). The implication was to associate the powerlessness and penetrability of being very young with being female: the weakness (and consequent need for an equalizing weapon) of *any* woman was on a par with that of a young boy.

Adult males were seen as powerful and nonpenetrable; therefore, penetration of a male could be explained only in terms of youthful powerlessness or shameful consent. Females of all ages were seen as powerless and penetrable, but were expected to safeguard that penetrability by whatever means necessary, the classic scenario being chaste martyrdom rather than homicide in self-defense.

Thus the Qing judiciary imagined the male rape victim as juvenile, therefore powerless; powerless, therefore penetrable; and, being both powerless and penetrable, therefore approximating the condition of being female. It was such a condition that made it possible to conceive of males as rapable. The discourse of *liang* never included men who penetrated other males, any more than it included men who engaged in illicit sex with women; *liang* applied only to males and females positioned in the "female" sexual role. Feminists argue that to be rapable is to be socially female, regardless of biological sex (e.g., MacKinnon, 1989: 178). The Qing judiciary seems to have taken this view quite literally.<sup>14</sup>

## *PATTERNS OF SOCIAL PRACTICE*

### *PARALLEL HIERARCHIES*

The judicial perspective corresponded closely to widespread social practices and perceptions. Most obviously, the penetrated male was younger than his penetrant, so that the gendered hierarchy of sexual roles coincided with that of age. This is true in all case records I have seen, including both rapes and amicable sexual relationships, with only two exceptions. Both exceptions (examined below), however, prove the rule that the hierarchy of sexual roles was seen properly to conform to age hierarchy.

Not only was the penetrated male younger, but in the majority of cases he was unmarried and in his teen years or younger (again, this includes both rapes and consensual unions). The youth of the penetrated male is accentuated by its eroticization: penetrants frequently testified that they were attracted to the youth and to such youthful and feminized features as the "clean and white skin" of those they penetrated.<sup>15</sup> Here we see a conflation of eroticized youth, femininity, and penetrability.

Hierarchies of age and of sexual role often parallel others: status (e.g., Buddhist or Daoist clergy penetrating novices), class (employers/masters penetrating employees/servants), and economic means (with the penetrant providing money or other valuables to his partner). The effect is to reinforce the gendered power relations already inherent in the hierarchy of sexual roles. This finding is supported by contemporary fiction, in which the homosexual roles conform to and are confirmed by parallel hierarchies (Hinsch, 1990: 134-136; Vitiello, 1992).

In the consensual same-sex unions reported in legal cases, there are signs apparently gendering the penetrated male as female. Some involve economic division of labor: in one case, the penetrated male wove cloth at home, which his lover sold at market. In many cases, two or more penetrants fought over a penetrated male, but I have yet to see the opposite; the penetrated male appears as an object of possessive desire.<sup>16</sup> Sometimes, the relative authority of partners mimicked that of contemporary heterosexual couples. In a 1762 example from Guangdong, Pan Asan (eighteen sui) lived with and was informally apprenticed to a barber, Miao Aliu (twenty-six sui), who penetrated him. Pan ran away for several days, staying with another man, whom he allowed to penetrate him; finally, Miao tracked him down, took him home, and scolded him. After that, Pan often defied and cursed his partner. One evening, he refused to sharpen razors in preparation for the next day's work, so Miao beat him; later that night, Pan refused to be penetrated, so Miao strangled him (Xingke tiben: 170/QL 27.4.18). This scenario closely fits the pattern of wife killings recorded in Qing legal archives, in which a wife's failure in gender duty (adultery, leaving home without permission, refusing sexual

intercourse, and other defiance) provokes her husband to homicidal rage.

#### THE ADULT MALE AS PENETRANT

Legal cases suggest that a male's sexual role could change, depending on his stage in life (cf. Hinsch, 1990: 136). Most basic is the sense that a fully socialized adult male should be a married householder, whose role is to penetrate (his wife), not to be penetrated. Marriage represented the key rite of passage in attaining social adulthood; with consummation, both male and female took up their respective social and sexual roles, as husband (penetrant) and wife (penetrated).

Several cases reveal a change in perceived role of a male who had in his youth consented more or less willingly to being penetrated by an older man. Sometimes the younger man, having matured, rejects the advances of his former lover: "I'm grown up now, and I'm not going to do that" (Xingke tiben: 177/QL 27.3.30).

Sometimes this change in attitude coincides with taking a wife. In a 1739 case from Sichuan, the peasant Zhou Jiu (nineteen sui) killed an older monk named Qing Yue. According to Zhou's confession, he lived not far from Qing's temple; in 1736, Zhou had gone there to play, whereupon Qing Yue persuaded Zhou to let him penetrate him in exchange for some walnuts. They had sexual intercourse once, after which Zhou did not return to the temple. One day in 1738, Qing Yue tried to repeat their sexual encounter by force, so Zhou killed the monk with a knife. When arrested, he claimed self-defense, but the magistrate was skeptical: "Since Qing Yue had already sodomized you, why did you reject him on this one occasion? . . . Obviously there was some other reason why you wished to stab him to death." Zhou responded: "Before, I was still young, and was sodomized by him because I was greedy to eat walnuts. When I later recalled this, I was deeply ashamed. Now, I've already grown up, and have also taken a wife. How could I still be willing to do this shameful thing?" The magistrate accepted this explanation, as did his superiors (Xingke tiben: 71/QL 4.7.12).

A male's changing sexual role figured too in a 1739 case from Shandong, in which the peasant Dong Er (twenty-eight sui) killed an

older monk surnamed Sun. Dong testified: "When I was a boy, I often went to the temple to play, and was seduced by monk Sun, who gave me sweets to eat, and sodomized me. Later, monk Sun moved to Fengshan Temple, a little over four li from [our village]. He often came to our village to collect alms, and when it got late he would spend the night at our house, and would have illicit sex with me."

Then, in late 1734 or early 1735, at the age of twenty-one sui, Dong Er took a wife. As Dong recounted, "Monk Sun told me many times that he wanted to sleep with my wife, but I didn't let him. But in Qianlong 1 (1736), I was too poor to get by, and I often asked monk Sun to lend me a hundred cash or so to buy rice; then I let him have sex with my wife. After that, he often came and went, and I spent several hundred cash of his." Poverty finally forced the couple to move in with the wife's natal family, which hampered Sun's sexual access to the woman. Shortly thereafter, Dong went to Sun's temple to ask for another loan to get through the winter; Sun refused to pay unless Dong brought his wife to live nearby. Dong then revealed his plan to travel to the east in search of employment. Sun got into a huff and went to bed (it was evening); Dong (who was spending the night at the temple), climbed onto the *kang* with him and went to sleep. Later, however, Sun woke him up and again pressed him to move nearby so they could continue their arrangement of trading sex for money; a quarrel ensued, in which the monk cursed Dong, who then beat him to death.

In six years, then, Dong went from being Sun's willing penetrated partner, to taking a wife and becoming a penetrant in his own right; at this point, Sun's sexual interest shifted from Dong to his new wife, and, in exchange for money, Dong began sharing his wife so that both men could penetrate her. The focus of Sun's lust had shifted so completely that on his last, fatal night, he evinced no interest whatever in having sex with Dong himself, even though the two men were in bed together (Xingke tiben: 69/QL 4.6.20).

What stands out is not simply that hierarchy of age-reinforced hierarchy of sexual role, but that fully socialized adult males should be penetrants only. Such a transition might involve several elements: age (growing up); marriage (taking up the social role as husband, reinforced by the sexual role as penetrant); and avoidance of being

penetrated (if it had happened before, preventing it from happening again).

#### THE STIGMA OF BEING PENETRATED

Cases from various regions of China reveal a pervasive, powerful stigma attached to the penetrated male, a stigma that did not touch his partner. Some men who wanted to penetrate others violently refused to be penetrated themselves.

In a 1738 case, Wang Si (twenty sui), a poor man from Gu'an county, was looking for work in Beijing as a casual laborer. One winter evening, having no money to pay for space in a heated public room at an inn, Wang squatted at the base of the city wall by Chongwen Gate to get through the night. In the middle of the night, Wang was accosted by another man—later identified as Dong Kui (mid-twenties), an impoverished bannerman who beat a drum in funeral processions—who planned to sleep by the wall as well. As Wang later testified,

[Dong] said, "If the two of us sleep together, we'll be warmer." I said, "I'm not sleeping next to you," and he said, "If you don't sleep with me I'll beat you up." I saw he was big and strong, and that I couldn't win a fight with him, so I [agreed to] sleep next to him.

Then he felt my pants, . . . saying, "If you let me sodomize you, I'll buy you a pair of cotton pants to wear." I said, "If you let *me* sodomize *you*, I'll give *you* a pair of cotton pants." He cursed me, saying, "If you don't let me sodomize you, I'll beat you to death!"

It was the middle of a dark night, and no-one was around, . . . so I was afraid; I tricked him, saying, "Now it's still early, and someone might walk by and see us; that would be embarrassing. Why don't you sleep for a while and then we'll talk about it?" So he went to sleep.

After Dong fell asleep, Wang Si murdered him.

Even if his retort about reversing roles may have been facetious, Wang seems to have felt that penetrating Dong would be better than being penetrated *by* him—and Dong took the retort as an insult, growing belligerent in response (Xingke tiben: 74/QL 4.3.2).

Sometimes, the shame felt by the penetrated male contrasts sharply with the bravado of the man who has penetrated him. A 1738 case from Zhili clearly shows this contrast. One night, Li Xuan (twenty-nine sui),

a casual laborer from Wenshui County, Shanxi, was sleeping at the home of two friends, Niu Yongtai and Chi Tingguang; these two lived and farmed together (one wonders about their relationship). The three men were sharing the same *kang*; as Li later testified:

I was already sound asleep, when that Niu Yongtai started to sodomize me. I was awakened by his sodomizing me (*bei ta jian xing le*), but at the time, since Chi Tingguang was also on the *kang*, and since this kind of shameful thing is not easy to speak of, all I could do was bear it and keep silent.

Some days later, Li met an acquaintance, Wei Minghou, in a wine shop:

He said to me, "You men from Wenshui County are all born to be rabbits." I thought of Niu Yongtai sodomizing me, and suspected that Niu Yongtai hadn't kept his mouth shut and had told people about it, so that Wei Minghou had that in mind when he made this comment; because of this, I felt ashamed.

Li went to Niu's home to confront him; it was night, and Niu was already in bed:

I said, "You sodomized me, but I bore it without saying anything, but now you've gone and told other people about it—what is this supposed to mean? Get up, so we can settle this!" He said, "But I'm not going to get up. What are you going to do about it?" I saw there was a rock sitting on the stove, so I picked it up to threaten him, saying, "If you don't get up, I'm going to beat you!" Niu Yongtai said, "I'll bet a rabbit like you wouldn't dare!"

Li Xuan took the dare, and beat him to death. After confessing, he summarized his motive:

In truth, because Niu Yongtai sodomized me, and then I was ridiculed by others, and then, when I went to confront Niu, he cursed me as a "rabbit"—because of all this, I became so extremely angry that I wanted to beat him to death.

Clearly, Niu Yongtai was not ashamed of his lust for another man; he did not consider himself a "rabbit" (slang for a male prostitute).<sup>17</sup> Li, in contrast, felt deeply shamed by having been penetrated and especially by publicity of that fact. It seems that his role in the act was far

more shameful than any sense of having been taken advantage of or coerced. It was more important to Li that Chi Tingguang, asleep beside them, not find out that he was being penetrated than it was to stop the intercourse itself—so he suffered the act to continue. Equally, it was public loss of face, more than the fact of having been penetrated, that provoked Li to confront and kill Niu (Xingke tiben: 76/QL 4.3.23).

Men penetrated in amicable relationships feared public exposure as well. This seems especially clear when the sexual partners inhabited a larger community of peasant households. (In contrast, same-sex unions in all-male contexts outside mainstream communities—e.g., among soldiers, sailors, or clergy—appear to have been less secretive; case records show that such relationships were often well-known to couples' associates.) In several court cases, public knowledge that one had been penetrated was described as a powerful loss of face: the phrases most commonly used are “to have no face” (*mei lianmian*); “to lose face” (*diu lian*); and “to be unable to face people” (*jian bu de ren*). The force of humiliation through village gossip is a major factor in a large proportion of cases involving the gamut of sex offenses, both heterosexual and homosexual. It is repeatedly cited as a motive for desperate acts, including homicide (to avoid or avenge exposure of rape, adultery, or homosexual relations), suicide (by women despairing over the stigma caused by rape or sexual proposition), and amateur abortion (most often by widows, to avoid the exposure of an affair).

A case from Zhili illustrates the pressure of stigma on an amicable relationship between two young men. Zhang Qibao and Huang Niuer were hired as long-term laborers by peasant Bai Chengwen in 1727, when they were twenty-four and nineteen sui, respectively; neither was married, so they shared a bed at Bai's house and soon began having sex. Early on, the men may have alternated roles—Zhang confessed that he and Huang had “sodomized each other,” although later, Zhang played the penetrated role, in spite of being older than Huang. As Zhang recalled, “At that time we swore not to tell anyone else,” and then “had a good relationship for these four or five years.”

In 1731, the two men began working separately for other employers, and since they no longer lived together, they met at the village temple to have sex. One time, a villager happened upon them and asked what they were doing, and to Zhang's horror, Huang told him that he had been sodomizing Zhang. As Zhang later confessed, “I



couldn't believe it. . . . I thought to myself, I'm a man of almost 30 sui, but here he goes telling other people about this; everyone in the village will find out—how will I be able to face them? I felt incredibly angry. . . . To my surprise, he wouldn't admit he was wrong, but instead argued and began to curse me. I became even angrier." Zhang later used an ax to kill Huang while he was taking a nap.

In the first hearing of his case, Zhang made no effort to deny the murder, but in an apparent attempt to protect his reputation, he did not confess the sexual relationship—instead asserting that Huang had "defamed" (*wu mie*) him by *claiming* to have penetrated him. He did not reveal the truth until a second hearing (the record does not say why he confessed, but clearly no one in the community had suspected the men were more than casual friends).

As an unmarried, poor laborer, Zhang had few claims to status in his community. The only ones, perhaps, were his maturity and masculinity, yet even these meager enough claims would be severely undermined by public knowledge that he had been penetrated, and by a younger man to boot. Huang Niuer obviously did not share Zhang's concern: Huang told Bai that *he* had penetrated Zhang, bragging about an act that apparently enhanced his own masculinity (Chang Wejen, 1986: 50-54).

Similar pressures were at work in a 1762 case from Hubei, in which three men from Xiaogan county worked as hired laborers in Zaoyang county (about 200 kilometers to the northwest). Wu Damou (thirty sui) had been sexually involved with his sworn older brother, Shi Shikong (thirty-one sui), for six years. As their relative ages would suggest, Shi penetrated Wu. Wu actually had a wife and daughter back in Xiaogan; because of poverty, he had left them in 1761 to accompany Shi to Zaoyang, where they were employed by Zhu Fengqi working ten *mu* of land, and lived in a room of Zhu's house. Wu supplemented their income by weaving cloth, which Shi sold at market (note the apparent gendering of household roles). According to Wu, the couple "got along extremely well."

After six months, they met another immigrant laborer from Xiaogan, Liu Huaizhi (twenty-four sui); he moved in with the couple and swore brotherhood with them. Within three days of moving in, however, Liu had discovered the couple's sexual relationship *and* the division of roles within it; on the third day he caught Wu alone and gave him an ultimatum: if Wu would not let Liu penetrate him as well,

Liu would expose Wu as Shi's penetrated sexual partner. Wu submitted. Shortly thereafter, an outraged Shi Shikong discovered their liaison; Wu then moved out with Liu, but two weeks later, jealousy provoked Shi to murder Liu.

Shi Shikong and Wu Damou were arrested, and at trial the magistrate pressed Wu to explain his behavior: "You had had sodomy with Shi Shikong for several years, so your affection (*qing yi*) for him must have been greater. Why did you stop living with Shi Shikong, and instead move in with Liu Huaizhi, with whom you had been having sodomy for only a short time? Furthermore, Liu Huaizhi is younger than you; how could you let yourself be sodomized by him?"

Wu's answer:

At first my affection with Shi Shikong was stronger. But our illicit relationship had been discovered by Liu Huaizhi, so that one day when he saw Shi Shikong was not at home, he trapped me [with his knowledge] and demanded to sodomize me; even though he's younger than I am, I had no choice but to submit.

Afterwards, we were discovered by Shi Shikong, and he made a big scene. . . . I feared that outsiders would find out and I would lose face. At that point, Liu Huaizhi told me that all three of us living together in a single room made things inconvenient, so he rented another place and asked me to move there with him. I thought to myself that if I moved out with him . . . at least we could avoid quarrels and the risk of being overheard and ridiculed by outsiders.

At a second hearing, pressed again by the magistrate, Wu added: "As far as me being somewhat older than Liu Huaizhi—I had done this vulgar thing with Shi Shikong, and because this had been found out by Liu Huaizhi, I was trapped and extorted by him so that I had no choice but to let him do as he wished."

Everyone seems to have found it strange that a younger male should penetrate an older one—but the magistrate finally accepted Wu's explanation that fear of exposure as a penetrated male forced him to submit to the private humiliation of submitting to a younger man. Wu's fear was so great that it induced him finally to abandon the lover for whom he had had such affection and to move in with his blackmailer. It was Liu's awareness of the stigma of being penetrated that enabled him to manipulate Wu in this way (Xingke tiben: 185/QL 27.9.24).

The interrogation of Wu underscores the coherence between judicial standards and popular perceptions in this area. It seems that stigma would attach to any male who was penetrated, but that penetration might be more comprehensible if it conformed to the sexual partners' respective positions in other hierarchies: age, class, wealth, and so on. Only a violation of the "natural" congruence of these hierarchies required special explanation.<sup>18</sup>

Homosexual relationships could obviously be more complex—both physically and emotionally—than an exclusive focus on anal intercourse would imply. Case records show magistrates developing evidence about particular acts to be prosecuted as crimes: it was the judicial fixation with sodomy which gives that act much of its prominence. We cannot hope to learn from these sources the entire meaning of such relationships to the participants.

Nevertheless, legal cases provide enough information on the symbolic meaning of sodomy to show that the judicial construction of that act conformed to a more pervasive pattern of understanding. The judicial analogy between sodomy and heterosexual illicit sex codified the contemporary common sense of what phallic penetration meant for both penetrant and penetrated.

#### *MARGINALIZED MALES*

The great majority of legal cases of both coercive and consensual homosexual acts involve men excluded from mainstream patterns of marriage and household by some combination of economic condition, social status, and occupation. They are hired laborers, beggars, Buddhist and Daoist clergy, soldiers, sailors, pirates, itinerant barbers, peddlers, and so on. A fair number are impoverished immigrants; almost all are unmarried and without family ties. In short, these are the marginalized individual males left out of the mainstream of Qing society.

That is not to say that elite men never engaged in sex with other males. But it went without saying that men of means would be expected to marry and to beget sons who could carry on the patriline and inherit family property. Such men might penetrate servants or patronize actors and prostitutes (more marginalized males), but such

pleasures would not likely be allowed to interfere with heterosexual duty. A paradigmatic example might be the Qianlong emperor, who managed to sire twenty-seven children in spite of his reputed taste for men (Hummel, 1970: 372).<sup>19</sup>

To the extent that there existed a social identity linked to homosexual relationships, it was probably associated with the marginalized males who for whatever reason could not buy into the valorized pattern of marriage and household, and who bonded with other men of similar condition as a way to satisfy a range of human needs. The consensual relationships found in legal cases often coincide with some form of resource-pooling, co-residence, and fictive kinship (sworn brotherhood, master/novice ties). Sexual bonding seems to play a partly functional role, as one element of multifaceted alliances in a world hostile to individuals on their own.<sup>20</sup>

The late Ming literatus Shen Defu took for granted same-sex unions among men isolated from sexual contact with women:

Sometimes, males are taken as sexual objects (*nan se*) because there is no alternative. For example, men who live in monasteries must take leave of the female quarters, and the statutes binding on Buddhist priests prohibit illicit sex [with females]. It is the same with those private tutors who live as guests in dormitories. These men must all adapt to circumstances (*jian jing sheng qing*) and settle for second best (*tuó wú bì xing*)—the situation cannot be avoided. In addition, there are criminals in prison for a long time who, if given the chance, will inevitably seek out a man to serve as a mate. . . . Also, in the northwest, the soldiers of the frontier garrison are too poor to pay to sleep with prostitutes, so they always pair up with fellow members of their ranks. . . . It is lonely, bitter, and distasteful, but such men do these things because they have no choice. . . . It is laughable, but also inspires pity.

Shen contrasted this “normal” pattern with what he saw as a new, decadent fashion among “gentlemen of ambition who install young catamites (*luan tong*) among their servants,” or who pursued actors. What made this fashion decadent, Shen implied, was that elite men enjoyed more than adequate outlets for sexual energies within marriage (and concubinage); for such men, sodomy was a wanton indulgence of lechery (Shen, 1976: 24/26a-b; Furth, 1988: 13-16).

Such stereotypes may have influenced the judicial characterization of homosexual penetrants, whose unsullied masculinity did not nec-

essarily earn them respectability. Legislation against homosexual rape portrayed the rapist as an “evil rascal” (*e gun*), an “evil character” (*e tu*), a “degenerate evil character” (*bu xiao e tu*), or a “rootless rascal” (*guang gun*, literally, “bare stick”; *gun*—“stick”—meaning an unmarried rogue with no family ties). Such characterization implies that the law aimed to protect the vulnerable males of proper households from penetration by rogue individuals not bound by family or community—an implication reinforced by the legal case records. It also parallels the Qing judiciary’s stereotype of heterosexual rape, in which a poor, unmarried male rapes a chaste woman of upright household—most of the men prosecuted for raping women also seem to have been marginalized males. Such stereotypes reflect the state’s fear that individuals not subject to socializing bonds threatened the family network underpinning social and political order (Sommer, 1994).

### CONCLUSION

The model for the judicial construction of sexual relations between males was heterosexual intercourse in conditions of gender inequality, in which the roles of penetrant and penetrated were perceived as fixed to the male and female, respectively. Male subject acted upon female object; in such circumstances, the act became inextricably bound up with the unequal distribution of power in the gender hierarchy and constituted both an expression of that unequal power and a means of inscribing it on the bodies and psyches of partners. Penetration became both the metaphor and physical expression of gender domination.

In the proper order of things, as seen by jurists, sexual intercourse took place only within marriage. The husband and master penetrated his wife: by doing so, he reproduced the patriarchal household and reinforced the axis of gender hierarchy at its heart.

In late imperial China, males and females came of age socially with marriage; a key transition point was its sexual consummation. Qing legal sources and common parlance referred to consummation as *cheng qin* or *cheng hun*: literally, “to complete/accomplish marriage,” this *cheng* being the same word used for the “accomplishment” of rape through penetration. Without consummation, a bride might be rejected, as sometimes occurred when she refused intercourse or when

some anomaly of her anatomy prevented the groom from achieving penetration (Xingke tiben: 74/QL 4.3.27).

With consummation, male and female took up their respective social roles as husband and wife, embodied in their sexual roles as penetrant and penetrated. Penetration represented an initiation into gendered and hierarchized roles: in Bourdieu's terms, these symbolic connections represent a homology between sexual and sociopolitical domains (1990: 71).

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, both chastity cults and criminal penalties codified this vision of penetration. If a woman were penetrated outside of legitimate marital context (by illicit sex, widow remarriage, or rape), then she suffered a pollution of her chastity, an objective degradation that imperial chastity cults symbolized by disqualifying her from canonization (if she were a victim of rape/murder or rape/suicide). Such pollution corresponded to that of debased status: therefore, the rape or abduction of a woman polluted by illicit sex or by debased status caused less harm than that of a chaste commoner woman and would be punished less severely.

This vision of penetration and pollution informed both the popular perception and the judicial construction of anal intercourse between males. For males, too, penetration positioned both roles on a hierarchy; the penetrated suffered a loss interpreted as an inversion or degradation of masculinity. The penetrant suffered no such loss, as he played the definitively masculine role.

The prosecution of illicit sex (*jian*) originally aimed to control access to women; therefore, the earliest laws against intercourse between males did not call that act *jian*. Nevertheless, even Song and Ming legislation against homosexual acts shared with *jian* a fixation with the polluting danger of penetration out of place. This shared fixation informed the Qing innovation of reconstructing sodomy as a variant of *jian*: hence the logic of equal penalties for "parallel" homosexual and heterosexual offenses. Eighteenth century concern about sodomy, like the contemporary obsession with female chastity, did not appear *ex nihilo*; heightened anxiety about gender performance prompted Qing jurists to scrutinize sodomy more closely, but their construction of that crime reveals a basic continuity with what came before.

In law and popular perception, then, penetration (of male or female) was understood as a potent and even dangerous act. Depending on its context, penetration could impose or overthrow legitimate hierarchies; it

could reproduce or invert gender order; it could initiate persons into social adulthood, or inflict a polluting stigma that provoked homicide and suicide.

We begin to understand why no Qing or earlier legal text even refers to, let alone bans, female homosexual activity. The lack of legal references does not, of course, imply that women never formed erotic relationships with each other—there are plenty of references in *nonlegal* sources (see Dai Wei, 1992; Hinsch, 1990; Topley, 1975; Van Gulik, 1974). Nor does it mean that Qing lawmakers were necessarily ignorant of such matters. Sex between women was simply not constructed as a crime. This makes sense, given the phallocentrism of both law and social norms: if gender and power were keyed to a hierarchy of phallic penetration, then sex without a phallus would seem to undermine neither.

The conflation of eroticized youth, femininity, and penetrability implies an instability in the gender of young males, especially prior to transition with marriage to adult masculinity. It seems that young males were perceived as vulnerable to penetration, and, in that sense, as potentially female. (Some of our cases show adolescent males being relatively open to penetration, an attitude some abandoned with maturity.) Thus, in the statutory language, it is the unpenetrated (*liang*) “sons and younger brothers” of commoner (*liang*) status who must be protected—vulnerable junior males who have not yet emerged from ambiguous youth into masculine adulthood.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, they must be protected from the rogue male threatening the household from without.

Qing jurists aimed not to protect individual rights, but rather to channel behavior into accepted gender roles—an ever greater priority as other social boundaries blurred. The spate of new laws against sodomy betrayed greater fear of the threat to vulnerable males, but also, perhaps, of their possible enjoyment of roles that conflicted radically with the demands of order. Pollution of female chastity threatened the gendered hierarchy of the household, but the degradation of masculinity did so too.

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#### APPENDIX A: The 1734 Substatute on Sodomy

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If evil characters (*e tu*) gather in a gang and abduct a young man of good character/commoner status (*liang ren zi di*—literally, “a son or younger brother of someone of good character/commoner status”) and forcibly so-

domize him (*qiang xing ji jian*), then the ringleader shall be sentenced to immediate beheading, according to the substatute on "rootless rascals" (*guang gun*). The followers, if they have also sodomized the victim, shall all be sentenced to strangulation after the assizes; remaining offenders [who did not commit sodomy] shall be deported to *Heilongjiang to serve as slaves for the armored troops there*; these sentences shall apply regardless of whether the offenders have committed homicide in the course of the crime.

Even if he has not gathered a gang, whoever murders a young man of good character/commoner status for illicit sex (*jian*), or lures away a young boy of 10 sui or under and forcibly sodomizes him, shall also be immediately beheaded according to the substatute on "ringleaders of rootless rascals."

Whoever rapes (*qiang jian*) a young boy of between 10 and 12 sui shall be sentenced to beheading after the assizes; whoever consensually sodomizes (*he jian*) a boy of such age shall be sentenced to strangulation after the assizes according to the statute that provides that "whoever engages in illicit sex with a young girl shall receive the penalty for coercion even if she consents."

If one man by himself commits forcible sodomy (*qiang xing ji jian*), but has not injured the victim, then he shall be sentenced to strangulation after the assizes. If the offender injures the victim but the victim does not die, then he shall be beheaded after the assizes. Whoever attempts rape but does not accomplish the act (*wei cheng*), and does not injure the victim, shall receive 100 blows of the heavy bamboo and life exile at a distance of 3000 li. If the offender injures the victim with an edged weapon but the victim does not die, then the offender shall be sentenced to strangulation after the assizes.

If a man consents to be sodomized (*ru he tong ji jian zhe*), then the offenders shall receive one month in the cangue and 100 blows of the heavy bamboo according to the substatute on "soldiers or civilians engaging in illicit sex" (*jun min xiang jian*).

If someone falsely accuses another man of sodomy, or commits other such fraud, and the truth comes out in a court hearing, then the offender shall receive the penalty mandated for the crime he has falsely accused the other of committing, with the exception that death penalties shall be reduced by one degree; if the penalty mandated [for the sodomy falsely alleged] is immediate beheading, then the offender shall be deported into military exile at the farthest frontier at the maximum distance of 4000 li, according to the substatute on "evil characters who cause trouble and commit violent acts" (*e tu sheng shi xing xiong*).

#### BACKGROUND OF THE SUBSTATUTE

This substatute was added to the Qing code in the second lunar month of 1734, in response to a memorial from Xu Ben, the governor of Anhui. Originally, the substatute provided that

*continued*



## APPENDIX A Continued

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Someone of 16 or 17 sui can still be considered a child who misbehaves out of ignorance; if [a young man of such age] rapes a young boy or girl, then his penalty should be reduced from those mandated by statute for rape that is "already accomplished" or "not accomplished."

Subsequently, senior officials protested that a male of 16 or 17 sui was already an adult and should be held accountable for his actions; in 1740 the provision was eliminated from the substatute.

The brief portion in italics specifying site of deportation was added in 1851 (Qing huidian shili: 825/989; Xue, 1970: 366-03; Wu, 1992: 951-952; for an alternate translation, see Hinsch, 1990: 143).

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## APPENDIX B:

## Males Who Commit Homicide While Resisting Rape

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If a male commits homicide while resisting rape (*nanzi ju jian sha ren*), and he is 15 sui or under, then he shall not be punished, regardless of whether he has committed planned or purposeful homicide or has committed homicide in a fight, as long as three conditions are fulfilled: (a) the dead man is at least 10 sui older than the killer, (b) there is testimony and other proof at the scene to allow an accurate assessment of the facts of the case, and (c) the dead man, prior to death, confesses in a manner compelling enough to serve as proof, or his relatives testify in a reliable manner acknowledging his guilt; if the homicide was not committed immediately upon the rape attempt, then the offender shall be sentenced to 100 blows of the heavy bamboo, to be redeemed in cash according to the statute [on crimes committed by minors].

If the offender is at least 16 sui, and he committed the homicide immediately upon the rape attempt, then he shall receive 100 blows of the heavy bamboo and three years of penal servitude; if the homicide was not committed immediately upon the rape attempt, then he shall receive 100 blows of the heavy bamboo and life exile at a distance of 3000 li.

If one of the following three conditions is fulfilled: (a) the dead man provides no confession prior to death, but he is at least 10 sui older than his killer, and it is clear that the homicide was committed while resisting rape and for no other reason; or (b) the dead man is not quite 10 sui older than his killer, but there is compelling testimony and other proof that the homicide was committed while resisting rape; or (c) the dead man, prior to death, confesses in a manner compelling enough to serve as proof, or his relatives testify in a reliable manner acknowledging his guilt—then, as long as the

offender is 15 sui or under, and he committed the homicide immediately upon the rape attempt, he shall receive 100 blows of the heavy bamboo and three years of penal servitude; if he did not commit the homicide immediately upon the rape attempt, he shall receive 100 blows of the heavy bamboo and life exile at a distance of 3000 li; the above penalties shall all be redeemed in cash according to the statute [on crimes committed by minors].

If the offender is at least 16 sui then, regardless of whether the homicide was committed immediately upon the rape attempt, he shall be sentenced to strangulation after the assizes, according to the statute on "unauthorized homicide of a criminal" (*shan sha zui ren*).

If the dead man is the same age as his killer, or is only a few sui older, or if interrogation proves there is some other reason for the homicide, and it has been falsely testified that the homicide was committed in resistance to rape to conceal this other reason, then the penalty shall be determined according to the basic [homicide] statutes, depending on whether it was premeditated or purposeful homicide, or homicide in a fight; in the Autumn Assizes, the determination of execution or reprieve shall also be made in the usual manner.

If the offender testifies that he was resisting rape, but there is no witness or confession provided by the dead man prior to death to confirm this, and interrogation produces no evidence of another reason for the homicide, then the penalty shall be determined according to the basic statutes on premeditated homicide, purposeful homicide, and homicide in a fight, and the offender shall be granted a reprieve in the Autumn Assizes.

If the offender was first sodomized, but later regretted this and rejected [the sodomist's subsequent advances], and there is definite proof of this, and he killed the sex offender (*jian fei*) when again being forced to engage in sodomy, then he shall be sentenced to strangulation after the assizes according to the statute on "unauthorized homicide of a criminal," regardless of whether the homicide was premeditated, purposeful, or committed in a fight, and regardless of the relative ages of the offender and the dead man. If the homicide was committed for some other reason, then the offender shall still be sentenced according to the basic statutes on premeditated homicide, purposeful homicide, and homicide in a fight.

#### BACKGROUND OF THE SUBSTATUTE

This substatute was created in 1823 by combining laws from the Qianlong and early Jiaqing periods; the last clause was added in 1824 (Xue, 1970: 285-33; Wu, 1992: 785; Qing huidian shili: 801/768-769; for an alternate translation, see Meijer, 1985).

## APPENDIX C

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|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| bei ta jian xing le 被他姦醒了          | jiang shenjing fang ru ren fenmen nei<br>yin xi 將腎莖放入人糞門內淫戲 |
| bi yin lü 比引律                      | jun min xiang jian 軍民相姦                                     |
| bu xiao e tu 不肖惡徒                  | liang jia zi di 良家子弟                                        |
| chang 娼                            | liang min 良民                                                |
| chang ren 常人                       | liang nan ji jian 兩男難姦                                      |
| chen qiang yu zhu jian 臣強與主姦       | liang ren fu nü 良人婦女                                        |
| cheng hun 成婚                       | liang ren zi di 良人子弟                                        |
| cheng qin 成親                       | luan tong 變童                                                |
| diu lian 丟臉                        | mei lianmian 沒臉面                                            |
| dou ou 鬥毆                          | nan chang 男娼                                                |
| e gun 惡棍                           | nan nü bu yi yi jiao 男女不以義交                                 |
| e tu 惡徒                            | nan se 男色                                                   |
| e tu sheng shi xing xiong 惡徒生事行兇   | nan wei chang 男爲娼                                           |
| gu gong 顧工                         | nanzi ju jian sha ren 男子拒姦殺人                                |
| guang gun 光棍                       | nazi yu funü da xiang xuan shu 男子與<br>婦女大相懸殊                |
| he jian 和姦                         | qiang 強                                                     |
| he tong ji jian 和同難姦               | qiang jian 強姦                                               |
| he tong zhe 和同者                    | qiang xing ji jian 強行難姦                                     |
| hui wu guan ru renkou 穢物灌入人口       | qing yi 情意                                                  |
| ji ("chicken") 雞                   | ru he tong ji jian zhe 如和同難姦者                               |
| ji ("to use a male as a female") 娼 | shan sha zui ren 擅殺罪人                                       |
| ji ba 雞巴                           | tuo wu bi xing 託物比興                                         |
| ji jian 難姦                         | tuzi 兔子                                                     |
| jian bu de ren 見不得人                | wei cheng 未成                                                |
| jian fei 姦匪                        | wu mie 污蟻                                                   |
| jian jing sheng qing 見景生情          | ye ji 野雞                                                    |
| jian min 賤民                        | yin xin 淫心                                                  |
| jian wu 姦污                         | yu liang ren you jian 與良人有間                                 |
| jiang nan zuo nü 將男作女              | zan liangge gan de goudang 咱兩個幹<br>的句當                      |

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## NOTES

1. See Hinsch's claim, based on a single work of fiction, that "male marriage was prevalent enough in Fujian that the men of that region even felt compelled to sacrifice to a patron deity of homosexuality" (1990: 133). The deity is a rabbit; since, as Hinsch notes, "rabbit" (*tuzi*) was

derogatory slang for a male prostitute, it seems unlikely that the author of the story expected to be taken seriously. For a more sophisticated treatment of the discourse of "male marriage," see Volpp (1994).

2. This article uses "homosexual" and "heterosexual" as adjectives for their literal meanings of "same-sex" and "different-sex," and to characterize practices or relationships only.

3. In classical Greece, legal codes used separate vocabulary to refer to penetrant and penetrated but no clear equivalents for the nouns "homosexual" and "homosexuality." Sanctions of sex between males focused on maintaining proper hierarchy, not unlike the prioritization of legal status in Chinese codes. On the other hand, there is evidence in Greek sources for about the same range of "sexual orientations" *in practice* as are familiar in late twentieth century America. Orientation, in and of itself, was simply not granted the primacy many people now accord it. Indeed, perceptions today are by no means uniform around the world; in much of Latin America only the penetrated male is considered "a homosexual," while the penetrant role confers "macho" status (Boswell, 1980, 1992).

4. Hinsch thinks he has found still earlier evidence. He quotes a law of the Qin dynasty (third c. B.C.) as mandating penalties for a servant who "forcibly fornicates with his master or mistress"; on this basis, he claims that "the Qin code lumps heterosexual and homosexual rape together" (1990: 142). In fact, the translations he cites render the law thus: "When a slave rapes his owner" (Hulsewé, 1985: 169) and "If a servant forcibly fornicates with a master" (McLeod and Yates, 1981: 116). Some interpret the law to mean a male slave who raped a *female* of his master's household and cite it as an early example of the priority of legal status (Zhang, Wang, and Lin, 1992: 424). The original—*chen qiang yu zhu jian*—seems to stress status difference rather than the sex of the person raped; in the absence of other evidence, caution seems appropriate.

5. For legal status in late imperial law, see Jing Junjian (1993), and Ch'u (1965).

6. Each date has been converted to the likely equivalent year according to the Western calendar.

7. Yang adds that "the statutes include a measure against *ji jian*" (using the obscure logograph for *ji*), but no such "statute" appears in any Ming or earlier legal code. Yang may well be referring to Buddhist prohibitions (also known as "statutes," *lü*); the possible influence of such prohibitions on secular law awaits further research.

8. It is not clear exactly when or why the logograph for "chicken" came into use, but it already connoted obscenity, appearing in slang for "penis" (*ji ba*—"chicken tail") and "streetwalker" (*ye ji*—"wild chicken"/"pheasant").

9. An age expressed in *sui* is one or two years lower than when expressed in the Western "years old": a person aged thirty *sui* is either twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old.

10. This substitute (Xue, 1970: 366-01) superseded the Ming statute on "consensual illicit sex" (*he jian*—366-00) in 1688, being cited thereafter to punish consensual heterosexual offenses among civilians (Sommer, 1994: 428; Hoang, 1915: 139; Wu, 1992: 951).

11. Heterosexual offenses: Xue, 1970: 366-00, 01, 02, 04, 07, 10, and 375-03, 04; homosexual offenses: Xue, 1970: 366-03, 07, 10, and 375-03, 04.

12. Guo's age is not given, so he must have been over twelve *sui*; we do not know his exact age, since the source for the case is a brief summary in a casebook. If he was an adult, then his case is unusual, since in every archival example that I have seen, the attempted rape of an adult male by a single rapist ended up in court only because one of the men had been killed (see below). For another case of gang rape, this time involving Manchu bannermen, see Xing an hui lan (52/8a-b).

13. This reasoning received formal codification in a substitute of 1775 (Xue, 1970: 366-10).

14. Laws promulgated by the Taiping rebels in the mid-nineteenth century reveal similar assumptions about rape: males under thirteen sui who had been coerced would be spared punishment, but *any* older male who had been penetrated was assumed to have consented. No such age qualification applied to females (Sommer, 1994: 161; Qiu Yuanyou, 1991: 50).

15. Qing erotica depicts the penetrated male with lighter skin than his penetrant (Hinsch, 1990: 146).

16. Prohibitions of sodomy in the "laws" of Qing secret societies assume that hierarchies of age and sexual role conformed with each other and portray "young and fair boys" and "younger brothers" as objects of sexual rivalry between older secret society "brothers" (Davis, 1977: 147).

17. In a 1739 case from Shaanxi, a man propositions a young boy: "People say you're a 'rabbit.' Now, I want to have sex with you—are you selling?" (Xingke tiben: 70/QL 4.9.5.). Also see Hinsch, 1990: 133.

18. Vitiello finds similar evidence in contemporary Daoist discourse on male homosexual relations (1992: 357).

19. To an extent, China resembled the Greco-Roman world, where "surrendering to penetration was a symbolic abrogation of power and authority—but in a way which posed a polarity of domination-subjection rather than of homosexual-heterosexual" (Boswell, 1992: 155).

20. Among pirates, anal penetration initiated male captives into the ranks and solidified fictive kinship/patron-client ties (junior pirates submitting to penetration by those whose favor they sought) (Murray, 1987, 1992). Fictive kinship could also frame homosexual relations among women outside the mainstream pattern of marriage and family (Topley, 1975).

21. One recalls Jia Baoyu—hero of the eighteenth century novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*—whose ambiguous gender performance acts out his reluctance to grow up (see Edwards, 1994).

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*Matthew H. Sommer is Assistant Professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania. He is currently completing a book on the regulation of sexuality in late imperial China.*



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## *Chigo* in the Medieval Japanese Imagination

PAUL S. ATKINS

*This article explores the representation of chigo—adolescent males attached to Buddhist temples or aristocratic households who were educated, fed, and housed in exchange for personal, including sexual, services—in medieval Japan. The author discusses how chigo were depicted in historical records, in contemporary short fictional narratives, and in a “Chinese” legend invented by Japanese Tendai monks; the chigo are also compared to the Tang consort Yang Guifei. Fictional and real chigo tend to fall victim to violence, and it is argued that the chigo functions as a surrogate sacrificial victim, a cultural figure whose role is outlined most prominently in the works of René Girard.*

SOME BUDDHIST TEMPLES AND aristocratic households in medieval Japan included among their members one or more *chigo* (literally, “children”), adolescent males who were given room, board, and education in exchange for their companionship and sexual services, which they were obliged to provide to high-ranking clerics or elite courtiers. In literary and dramatic texts and in pictures such as those included in illustrated handscrolls (*emaki*), the *chigo* are often portrayed as the center of attention at banquets—seated in the place of honor and drinking from the host’s cup, the *chigo* sings, dances, plays music, or composes poetry while the other guests watch in rapt delight. In the handful of extant short stories from the medieval period featuring *chigo* (a subgenre known as *chigo monogatari*), the *chigo* typically meets a tragic death by suicide, murder, or illness. In some cases, the *chigo* is posthumously revealed to have been an avatar of a bodhisattva, usually Kannon (Avalokiteśvara). Around the figure of this “divine boy” accreted a great deal of lore, ritual, and literature whose contradictions pose intriguing and troubling questions. How does the portrayal of *chigo* in cultural discourse compare to the historical record? Why are these sexual playthings simultaneously deified and repeatedly subjected to violence? What does the plight of the *chigo* reveal about the inner workings of medieval Japanese politics, religion, and culture? These questions lead us to a deeper understanding of the intersecting histories of sexuality, violence, kingship, and the sacred in East Asia and beyond.

THE HISTORICAL REALITIES OF *CHIGO*

This study is principally concerned with depiction, which is to say, with the necessary distortions, intentional and otherwise, that writers, painters, and other artists introduce in the process of pretending to represent reality. Yet before discussing how *chigo* were depicted in short fiction, handscrolls, and *noh* plays, it is first necessary to understand how *chigo* actually functioned in medieval Japanese society (by consulting historical records) and to develop a basis for comparison.

Tsuchiya Megumi has written about the function and role that *chigo* played in the private quarters (*in* and *bō*) of medieval Japanese temples, drawing upon temple records instead of accounts from folk literature (2001, 130–77, 239–43). Various classes of children were attached to temples: The *chigo* were second only to the *kindachi*, who were children of high-ranking aristocratic families. Drawing upon examples from temples such as Daigoji and Ninnaji, Tsuchiya postulates three ranks of *chigo*: At the top were those who were sons from ministerial families (*seikake*); below them, sons of temple administrators (*bōkan*); and below them, sons of attendant priests, samurai, and bodyguards of retired emperors (*hokumen no bushi*). In general, at Ninnaji the *chigo* were sons of men who held the sixth rank or higher, and *chigo* of the middle group (sons of temple administrators) were the most active.

*Chigo*, Tsuchiya observes, had two principal duties. First, they participated in formal processions, religious ceremonies, and public functions. The ceremonies were elaborate, carefully choreographed events in which a central figure, such as an abbot, was transported in an oxen-pulled carriage while others, mostly attendants, walked or rode ahead or behind. These processions were held during important events, such as the inauguration of an abbot, and were indices of the central figure's status. (The central government tried unsuccessfully to limit the number of *chigo* and other attendants who could participate in processions.)

Second, the *chigo* were responsible for providing personal service to their masters. They would serve meals, receive guests, and attend closely to the master.

In exchange, the *chigo* were granted unusual privileges that were not given to the other temple children. They were permitted to wear their hair long (waist length, in some paintings), powder their faces, and dress extravagantly. Some were even permitted to eat meat, and even *chigo* who were sons of temple secretaries or samurai were allowed to sit very close to the seat of honor at a banquet, far above the places where their fathers sat.

Besides the specific duties that *chigo* performed, Tsuchiya shows, the *chigo* were obliged to obey their masters unconditionally; the relationship was likened to that between parent and child or lord and vassal. In many scholarly treatments of the *chigo*, they are viewed largely within the context of *nanshoku* (literally, “male–male sexuality,” but for the most part in premodern Japan, this meant pederasty) because the obedience a *chigo* owed to his master extended to the

bedchamber. Indeed, in literary accounts of the *chigo*, their physical beauty and charm play prominent roles, and *chigo* are often depicted in sexual relationships with Buddhist clerics.

One text that Tsuchiya and others draw upon extensively is *Uki*, a *kambun* text written by Cloistered Prince Shukaku (1150–1202), abbot at Omuro in Ninnaji, that includes extensive remarks on how *chigo* should behave. *Chigo* should rise early for their prayers; they should not walk around after eating with toothpicks in their mouths; they should pick up their feet while walking down corridors. Among the prince's points is that the term of a *chigo* was brief: just four or five years before taking the tonsure at age seventeen to nineteen at the latest (not all *chigo* took the tonsure; others married and set up their own households). From this we can gather that *chigo* ranged in age from twelve to nineteen, an estimate that accords with the literary depictions. *Chigo*, the prince wrote, should use this precious time wisely, studying music and other arts, participating in poetry gatherings, and reading secular literature (Buddhist texts could be studied after taking the tonsure).

Another view of *chigo* gleaned from historical records is that of Hosokawa Ryōichi (2000, 75–79). Hosokawa's points have been thoroughly summarized elsewhere (Faure 1998, 269–73), but they are worth repeating here, as they shed light on the principal question of this study—why *chigo* are so often victims or intended victims of murder and suicide in medieval Japanese literary works.

The most compelling section of Hosokawa's findings is his descriptions of two *chigo* who were kept by Jinson (1430–1508), the aristocratic abbot of the Daijōin temple at the Kōfukuji complex in Nara. Son of the minister and scholar Ichijō Kaneyoshi (or Kanera, 1402–81), Jinson's activities are relatively well known because of the survival of his diary entries in *Daijōin jisha zōjiki*.

First, Hosokawa discusses the career of Aichiyo-maru, the son of a temple administrator at Daijōin. He came to Jinson in 1475, at the age of fourteen, and lived at the temple dressed as a *chigo* and was supported by Jinson until the age of nineteen, when he underwent the coming-of-age ceremony (*genpuku*; this would have entailed cutting his hair, abandoning the use of makeup, and dressing in men's clothing) and took the name Sashida Yasukurō Nobutsugu. (Typically youths either took the tonsure or underwent the coming-of-age ceremony at about age fifteen.) The following year, 1481, he left Nara for Sakai, where he had been appointed manager of an estate owned by Daijōin, which indicates that the Sashida were of the samurai class. In 1498, at the age of thirty-seven, the former Aichiyo-maru killed himself for unknown reasons.

In contrast, the *chigo* Aimitsu-maru entered Jinson's service as a menial in 1461, at age fifteen. Aimitsu-maru's father was a low-ranking servant who was attached to one of the other temples at Kōfukuji and is known to have

performed as a drummer in *noh* performances. Jinson bought Aimitsu-maru, for all intents and purposes, in 1467, from his father when Aimitsu-maru was twenty-one years old. In 1472, Aimitsu-maru took the tonsure and the name Jōami at the age of twenty-six, long past the usual age; his low social status prevented him from actually becoming a priest. After years of illness, he committed suicide in 1474 at the age of twenty-eight while still in the service of Jinson, who conducted his funeral and remembered his former charge with fondness. Hosokawa cites a passage from Jinson's diary that, he says, all but confirms that Jinson had a sexual relationship with Aimitsu-maru, and he suggests that age had robbed the former serving boy both of his privileged status as *chigo* and of Jinson's affections.

Hosokawa (2000, 62, 82) uses the tragic cases of Aichiyo-maru and, especially, Aimitsu-maru to show the underside of the social institution of *chigo*, celebrated with naïve enthusiasm by aesthetes such as Inagaki Taruho (1986) and Matsuda Osamu (1988). For Hosokawa, the relationship between Jinson and Aimitsu-maru/Jōami was one of social and physical domination in which the highborn Jinson owned his lowborn *chigo* body and soul.

The physical relationships between *chigo* and their masters are nowhere more explicitly detailed than in the illustrated scroll known as *Chigo no sōshi* (or, alternatively, *Chigo sōshi* or *Daigo nanshoku-e*). The whereabouts of the original are unknown, but two copies are known to exist, one said to be in the possession of Daigoji temple and bearing a colophon saying it had been copied in 1321.<sup>1</sup> There are five stories (presumably fictional) contained in the scroll, illustrated with pictures that, most notably, depict the *chigo* receiving anal sex and receiving and giving oral sex in a variety of positions.

The episodes may be summarized briefly as follows: (1) An aging priest is no longer able to penetrate his beloved *chigo*. Out of sympathy for his flaccid master, the *chigo* summons a male servant to lubricate his anus, warm it, and expand it using a dildo and his penis. The excited servant masturbates and is later berated by his wife for a lack of sexual stamina. (2) A priest falls in love with another priest's *chigo*. The *chigo* arranges a rendezvous in the garden. After repeated liaisons, the *chigo* takes the tonsure and the two continue their affair. (3) A monk falls in love with the *chigo* of a high-ranking priest. He makes advances toward the *chigo*, who refuses at first but then takes the monk as a lover. Eventually they have sex next to the sleeping priest. (4) A beautiful and proud *chigo* kept by an aristocrat attracts the attention of a low-ranking, old monk. Out of pity, the *chigo* permits the lovelorn monk to penetrate him. (5) A young monk admires the *chigo* of a stern priest. He learns that the *chigo* sleeps in a walled room (*nurigome*; most rooms were enclosed by sliding

<sup>1</sup>There is very little firsthand information available about the Daigoji scroll, which is closely held. See Sawa Ryūken (1978, 22) and Takahashi Tetsu (1965).

screens or doors), and sneaks inside to wait. When the *chigo* returns, he realizes that someone is present, but pretends not to notice, and chats with an attendant. As the *chigo* lies on the floor with the lower half of his body in his room, he is penetrated by the hidden monk. Later the *chigo* has a little door installed so that the monk can come and go as he pleases.<sup>2</sup>

While the existence of a fourteenth-century original cannot be confirmed (indeed, the scroll's handling of its topic is redolent of the early modern, not the medieval, sensibility), the *Chigo no sōshi* scrolls serve as an important reminder of aspects of the relationships between *chigo* and their masters that may occasionally be overlooked in our efforts to view them in the contexts of religion, history, or literature. Sexual attraction fueled the establishment and maintenance of what one might term the *chigo* "system" (*chigo-sei*), and anal penetration of the *chigo* by his master was its highest "ritual." The element of transgression is significant in these fantasies. None of them depict sex between a *chigo* and his master; in all cases, the sex occurs between the *chigo* and an admirer or other type of proxy. While the *chigo* owes his loyalty and subservience to his master, another man intervenes to supplant the master, effectively cuckolding him, and to assert his physical dominance over the master as well as the *chigo*, who typically remains blasé with regard to the action taking place, emotionally removed in a posture of remote beauty.

#### TALES OF THE *CHIGO*

If the original 1321 colophon that is reproduced in copies of *Chigo no sōshi* is authentic, then the original illustrations would rank among the earliest examples of *shunga*, Japanese erotic pictures (Hashimoto 1996, 112). For its part, the text would belong to a subgenre of medieval Japanese fiction known as *chigo* tales (*chigo monogatari*). *Chigo* tales constitute a small portion of the medieval Japanese narrative genre known as "companion tales" (*otogi zōshi*). Of the five hundred extant companion tales, ten may be classified as *chigo* tales, that is, stories that feature a *chigo* prominently. They are,

- "A Long Tale for an Autumn Night" (*Aki no yo no nagamonogatari*)
- "The Tale of Genmu" (*Genmu monogatari*)
- "The Mountain" (*Ashibiki*)
- "Hanamitsu" (*Hanamitsu*)
- "The Tale of Matsuho Bay" (*Matsuho no ura monogatari*)
- "The Tale of Mount Toribe" (*Toribeyama monogatari*)
- "The Tale of Saga" (*Saga monogatari*)

<sup>2</sup>For photographs of excerpts of an Edo-period copy of *Chigo no sōshi*, see Hashimoto Osamu (1996). For a deluxe, limited-edition facsimile of an earlier copy, see Inagaki Taruho and Ihara Saikaku (1977, vol. 2).

“The Tale of Ben” (*Ben no sōshi*)

“The New Servant is a *Chigo*” (*Chigo ima mairi*)

“The Story of Kannon’s Manifestation as a *Chigo*” (*Chigo Kannon engi*)<sup>3</sup>

In most (but not all) of the stories, a monk falls in love with a *chigo*, and typically the results are disastrous. Tales in which a monk falls in love with a woman tend to take on a comic tone, but when the beloved is a *chigo*, the tale often ends tragically. The *chigo* may be kidnapped (*Aki no yo*, *Chigo ima mairi*), falsely accused (*Hanamitsu*), or attacked (*Ashibiki*). Others may attempt to kill him (*Ashibiki*), or he may actually be slain (*Genmu*). Perhaps the *chigo* dies of lovesickness (*Toribeyama*, *Ben no sōshi*), but he is just as likely to drown himself (*Aki no yo*) or to trick others into murdering him (*Hanamitsu*). After death, it may be claimed that the *chigo* was the avatar of a god or bodhisattva (*Aki no yo*, *Ben no sōshi*, *Chigo Kannon engi*, *Genmu*).

Let us take a closer look at three *chigo* tales—“A Long Tale for an Autumn Night,” “The Tale of Genmu,” and “The Mountain”—to see in detail how *chigo* are portrayed in medieval Japanese short fiction.

#### “A LONG TALE FOR AN AUTUMN NIGHT”

“A Long Tale for an Autumn Night” is the most famous of the *chigo* tales, and it is generally considered to be an influential masterpiece. It dates from the mid-fourteenth century. The plot may be summarized as follows; interested readers are encouraged to consult Margaret H. Childs’s fine translation (1980) or the original classical Japanese version annotated by Ichiko Teiji (1958).

Keikai is a Buddhist priest on Mount Hiei, located northeast of Kyoto and home to a massive complex of temples and cloisters centered upon the Tendai temple Enryakuji. One night Keikai has a dream of a beautiful youth aged sixteen or seventeen. At Onjōji—the temple commonly called Miidera, Enryakuji’s historical rival, located in Ōmi Province east of Hiei—he catches a glimpse of the boy whom he saw in his dream and falls in love at first sight. (The boy is a temple *chigo*, son of the “Hanazono Minister of the Left.”) Keikai manages to get a letter to the boy via a servant; the correspondence leads to a meeting, and the relationship is consummated. After they part, Keikai falls ill of lovesickness. Hearing of this, the boy leaves Miidera without permission to visit Keikai at Hiei. Along the way, he and his servant are abducted by a goblin disguised as a mountain ascetic and thrown into a cave with the rest of his victims. Then the priests of Miidera discover that the boy is gone and that he has been involved

<sup>3</sup>Printed versions of the originals of all of these texts may be found in the pages of *Muromachi monogatari taisei* (Yokoyama and Matsumoto, 1973–88). There are annotated versions of *Aki no yo no nagamonogatari* (Ichiko 1958) and *Ashibiki* (Ichiko 1989). Margaret H. Childs has published English translations of *Aki no yo no nagamonogatari* (1980), *Genmu monogatari* (1991, 1996b), and *Chigo Kannon engi* (1996a).

with a monk from Hiei. They immediately conclude that Keikai has taken the boy with the consent of the boy's father. The priests destroy the father's residence, then build an ordination platform to provoke the Hiei monks, who jealously guard their exclusive right to ordain Tendai clergy. Hiei raises a massive force of warrior-monks and destroys the Miidera complex; Keikai fights with especial fervor, as he feels the entire matter is his own fault.

Back in the cave, the boy overhears the goblins who are guarding him talking about the battle at Miidera, and he grieves. One of his fellow prisoners turns out to be a storm god who floods the cave and frees all the prisoners. The boy visits his father's residence and Miidera, both in ruins. He sends his servant to Keikai with a note, then drowns himself. Upon finding the boy's body, Keikai and the servant are devastated and go into seclusion in the mountains. The Miidera priests are preparing to leave their wasted temple when they see the god of their mountain, Shinra Daimyōjin, greet the god of Mount Hiei, Hie Sannō. The two gods hold a banquet, and after Hie Sannō leaves, the priests ask Shinra Daimyōjin why he is on such friendly terms with the patron god of their enemy.

The god replies with multiple arguments: first, the familiar one that divine logic cannot be understood by humans. He also claims that the destruction will allow others to accumulate karmic merit by recopying the sūtras and rebuilding the temples that were destroyed, and that the entire affair helped bring Keikai to a true religious awakening. As for the boy, he was actually a manifestation of Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion, who was reborn in the human world to achieve these purposes.

Aside from the goblin and the appearance of the two gods at the end of the story, "A Long Tale for an Autumn Night" is surprisingly realistic. Enryakuji and Miidera were real entities whose long, bitter rivalry included repeated disputes over Miidera's asserted right to an ordination platform and the measure of independence it would have granted, and Hiei's monks attacked Miidera's temples on numerous occasions (Adolphson 2000, 65, 138–40). Moreover, the story ably deploys stock scenes and stereotypes—the highborn *chigo*, love at first sight, illness brought on by lovesickness, a vulnerable figure on a perilous journey, and the suicide of a melancholy youth—that make it quite palatable to readers.

The tale's most interesting developments come at the end, in Shinra Daimyōjin's shocking pronouncements. How could the patron deities of the rival temples hold a friendly banquet after their clients had just emerged from a devastating battle? The misfortunes of Miidera will be compensated for by the opportunities created for accruing karmic merit, and Keikai's troubles are made up for by his newly revived faith. Perhaps the most unsettling aspect of the story, the *chigo*'s suicide, is handled by dehumanizing the boy, by elevating him to divine status. Oddly enough, this last gesture also has deep roots in historical reality, for Tendai monks developed elaborate initiation rituals for *chigo* in which the boys were depicted as avatars of Kannon (Abe 1984b; Matsuoka 2004). In my view, stories such as "A Long Tale for an Autumn Night" and *chigo* initiation rituals

served a similar purpose, namely, to help legitimize the *chigo* system, which violated monastic precepts against all sexual contact.

#### “THE TALE OF GENMU”

In “The Tale of Genmu,” the protagonist of the title (whose name means “illusion”) is a priest who falls in love with Hanamatsu, a boy from a distant temple. Genmu eventually travels there for a visit, and they spend the night together. When Hanamatsu disappears suddenly, Genmu makes inquiries and learns that he has, in fact, spent the night with a ghost—the boy had been killed seven days earlier in a vendetta. Hanamatsu’s father was killed in a duel when the boy was still small; the boy vowed to exact revenge when he was old enough and, disobeying the wishes of the priests, killed his father’s killer. Shortly afterward, he was, in turn, killed by the son of his victim.

In this story, Hanamatsu’s death shakes the priest Genmu out of his delusions. The experience returns him to a true life of piety and ardent devotion. Even more remarkably, he meets the young man who killed Hanamatsu. Shocked by the experience of killing a young boy, the man ends the cycle of violence by taking Buddhist vows and praying for Hanamatsu’s salvation. The two join their efforts in prayer and are guided into the Pure Land paradise at death. Hanamatsu, the narrator tells us, was actually an avatar of Monju (Mañjuśrī), the bodhisattva of wisdom.

The basic outlines of this story have been noticed in various texts of the medieval period, such as the early fifteenth-century *setsuwa* collection *Sangoku denki* (Tokuda 1988, 504–5); it has even been suggested that the tale has a basis in fact (Gotō 1943, 92–94). As in “A Long Tale for an Autumn Night,” we need not be excessively concerned about the death of the *chigo* protagonist; he is not a real human being but a supernatural figure who assumes human guise in order to bring to spiritual awakening Genmu and the young man who kills Hanamatsu. About “The Tale of Genmu,” Childs has written that

Although the tale contains references to doctrinal condemnations of love between males, the characters show no concern in this regard. Traditionally, of course, clergy were expected to remain completely celibate, but with the development of the belief that such discipline was beyond human ability, many monks acquiesced to their desires, whether heterosexual or homosexual, without necessarily feeling hypocritical or guilty. (1996b, 36–37)

It is true that same-sex liaisons between monks and other males were not singled out for special condemnation; all sexual relationships were forbidden to them. But the notion that such precepts were widely regarded as *passé* is undermined by the internal logic of the story. Monju assumes the form of the *chigo*, charms Genmu, and is slain in order to bring Genmu and the *chigo*’s killer to religious awakenings.



The source of Genmu's delusion is his infatuation with the *chigo*; the source of the killer's delusion is his thirst for revenge. Only when the two men realize the folly of their ways and renew their devotions to Amida can they be saved. If there is nothing harmless in Genmu's relationship with Hanamatsu, then there is no reason for Genmu to exclaim, "I stupidly let myself become entangled in a an attachment, in a romantic passion ... I was deluded! How ashamed I am!" (Yokoyama and Matsumoto 1973–88, 4:412–13; translation in Childs 1996b, 50). This is the realization that prompts his newfound faith, and it cannot be based on a false premise.

"The Tale of Genmu" resembles "A Long Tale for an Autumn Night" insofar as the *chigo* protagonists of both stories die unnatural deaths (suicide and murder, respectively) but are revealed in the end as manifestations of bodhisattvas (Monju and Kannon, respectively). With the addition of the last detail, the stories at once sacralize the *chigo* and diminish his humanity. The loss of these adolescents is not truly tragic because they were not really human, and their deaths were instruments in grander plans to bring the monks who loved them (or thought they loved them) to experience enlightenment.

#### "THE MOUNTAIN"

The final story I should like to address in this brief survey of *chigo* narratives is "The Mountain."<sup>4</sup> Like "A Long Tale for an Autumn Night" and "The Tale of Genmu," it is considered a fine example of the *chigo* tale subgenre. Unlike those two narratives, however, it has never been translated into English, so a more detailed summary of its plot may be helpful.

A Confucian scholar and imperial bureaucrat becomes disillusioned by his lack of advancement and abandons Confucianism for Buddhism. His one tie to the world is a concern for his handsome and talented son; after some searching, he finds a priest on Mount Hiei to whom he can entrust his son for training so that he might enter the Buddhist priesthood. Although it will mean the end of the family line, the son can pray for the repose of his father's soul in the afterlife.

After a few years, the boy is ordained and given the name Gen'i. He later takes a trip to Kyoto and catches a glimpse under the autumn moon of a *chigo* from one of the Nara temples. The *chigo* is the son of an aristocrat, the lord of civil affairs, Tokugō. Eventually the two meet and fall in love, only to part ways and return to their respective temples.

Heartbroken, the *chigo* sets out the following month to find his lover. Unused to travel, he finally makes his way to Jijū's cloister on the mountain. He gets a warm reception on Mount Hiei, but back at his home temple in Nara, the

<sup>4</sup>*Ashibiki* (*no*) is a well-known epithet from Japanese poetry that is sometimes translated as "foot-sore" or "foot dragging" and is typically followed by the word *yama* (mountain). When the *chigo* of the tale asks the monk who has fallen in love with him where he lives, the monk simply replies, "Ashibiki," indicating "the mountain," which, in turn, signifies Mount Hiei.

monks search for the missing boy and eventually locate him. It is decided that Gen'i will accompany the *chigo* back to Nara. He does so and meets Tokugō, who agrees that the two should live together on Mount Hiei.

Preparations are being made for the boy's departure when his evil stepmother (the father's first wife, the *chigo*'s mother, is dead), a former serving woman, succumbs to her feelings of envy and cuts off the *chigo*'s long hair while he is sleeping. The departure is cancelled and the forlorn *chigo* secretly runs away to Mount Kumano. Gen'i and Tokugō are devastated. Gen'i falls ill and various shamans are called; a *yamabushi* healer comes to help, bringing with him a young assistant, who turns out to be the *chigo*. Jijū recovers upon being reunited with his beloved, and the two complete their move to Hiei.

After a few years of living with Gen'i, the *chigo* (who now is known as His Lordship the Junior Captain, *Shōshō no kimi*) decides to see his aging father and returns to Nara with Gen'i. Before they arrive, however, the stepmother engages her son-in-law, Raikan (the husband of her daughter by an unknown man), to murder her stepson, who she claims is coming to drive them all out. Gen'i gets wind of the plan, marshals the monks he has brought from Hiei, and routs the band of brigands assembled by Raikan, whose head is taken by Gen'i himself.

Battle between Hiei and the monks of Nara (Raikan was a monk at one of the temples in Nara) is averted through the intercession of Tokugō, who explains to the Nara monks why one of their own was killed by a priest from Hiei. The tension between Hiei and Nara had already been touched upon by Gen'i and the *chigo* early in their relationship.

Tokugō drives out the stepmother, her daughter, and their servant. The *chigo* (now known as the Zen monk) inherits the temple that his old teacher had owned; Gen'i also inherits his teacher's property. Years pass as the pair win rank and fame through their skills and learning.

Then Gen'i visits his father while the latter is dying, and the father warns him against seeking fame and glory. After his father's death, Gen'i retires to Ōhara and later Mount Kōya. There he meets an aged recluse, who turns out to be the Zen monk and former *chigo*. The two spend some time together, and each eventually passes away onto the Pure Land. The story concludes with the moral that riches and fame, including the desire for advancement in the clerical hierarchy, are transient and unworthy of pursuit.

"The Mountain" shares in common with "A Long Tale for an Autumn Night" the standard plot element of a monk and a *chigo* from rival temples. To that is added the evil stepmother, with a twist: Her victim is her stepson, not her stepdaughter. In many ways, the *chigo* of "The Mountain" functions as a female character; for example, when preparations are being made for his move to Hiei, the atmosphere is one of a household getting ready for a wedding. Even the stepmother's act of violence against the *chigo*—cutting off his hair—is aimed at his feminine beauty (not his manly honor, symbolized as a topknot; a *chigo* wore

his hair in a long ponytail stretching to his waist). It is clear from the story's final lesson, and by the depiction of the Hiei monks as stalwart and virtuous in contrast to their Nara counterparts, that the primary audience of "The Mountain" was the monks of Hiei. To this audience, no attempt is made to justify the *chigo* system by claiming that he is actually the manifestation of a bodhisattva; indeed, the relationship between Gen'i and his *chigo* is wholeheartedly approved of by their parents and teachers.

#### PILLOW BOY, CHRYSANTHEMUM BOY

The themes, motifs, and plots of *chigo* tales crystallize in noh drama. While there are numerous noh plays in which the main character is a teenage boy, or in which an adult male is portrayed by a boy actor, the figure of the *chigo* is addressed most directly in the play known as *Kiku jidō* (Chrysanthemum Boy) in the Kanze school of noh acting and as *Makura jidō* (Pillow Boy) in the others.

An envoy from the Chinese emperor Wen of Wei is sent to locate the source of a spring at the base of Mount Li-xian that is said to emit medicinal waters.<sup>5</sup> Arriving at the mountain with two servants, the envoy encounters an odd-looking boy who states that he once attended King Mu of Zhou.<sup>6</sup> This makes the envoy suspicious; King Mu had ruled several hundred years earlier. But, as proof, the boy shows him a gift from King Mu: a pillow with Buddhist verses inscribed upon it. The boy had copied the verses onto the leaves of chrysanthemums growing nearby, and the dew that dripped from them became the elixir of eternal life that the envoy has been searching for. The boy imbibes this elixir, playfully feigning drunkenness, and dances for the envoy. Then he returns to his mountain hut, and the envoy, we may presume, returns to the capital with the elixir for the emperor.<sup>7</sup>

This is the version of the story as it is performed today. It seems incomplete and fragmentary because it is actually an abridgement of an older play. The older play depicted in its first act the boy's journey into exile at Mount Li-xian, his punishment for the crime of stepping over King Mu's pillow. The officers escorting the boy stop at one side of a bridge deep in the mountains, send the boy over to the other side, and cut the bridge away, abandoning him to die there.

No one has been identified as the author of *Chrysanthemum Boy* or its variants; the earliest recorded performance of the play took place in 1534 (Takemoto

<sup>5</sup>Emperor Wen (Wen Di, 187–226) was the first emperor of the Wei dynasty, which lasted from 220 to 265. He ruled from 220 to 226.

<sup>6</sup>King Mu (Mu Wang, r. 1002 BCE–947 BCE) was the fifth monarch of the Zhou dynasty, which lasted from 1100 BCE to 256 BCE.

<sup>7</sup>For an English translation of this play, see Paul S. Atkins (1998).

1985, 23). The story is derived from the following anecdote included in the fourteenth-century military epic *Taiheiki*:

Long ago during the time of King Mu of Zhou, there appeared eight heavenly horses named Ji, Dao, Li, Hua, Liu, Lu, Er, and Si. King Mu mounted them and rode them to the ends of the earth. In India once he crossed a mountain river 100,000 miles wide and reached the country of Srāvastī in central India. At the time the Buddha was preaching the *Lotus Sūtra* on Vulture Peak. King Mu dismounted and went to where the audience was, bowed to the Buddha, withdrew to one side, and took a seat. The Buddha asked him, “What country are you from?” King Mu answered, “I am king of China.” The Buddha then said, “It is well you have come to this gathering place now. I have a teaching for ruling nations. Would you like to learn it?” King Mu said, “I wish to perform the virtuous deed of fulfilling my duties, ruling the people, and pacifying the nation.” Then the Buddha, using the Chinese language, bestowed upon King Mu eight verses from the four essential chapters [of the *Lotus Sūtra*]. They were what are now known as the esoteric passages that distill the teachings and rules of the *Lotus*. After his return to China, King Mu held them secret deep in his heart and did not transmit them to others.

Around this time there was a young lad called Ci-tong, of whom King Mu was particularly fond; therefore he remained in constant attendance upon the sovereign. Once Ci-tong was passing by his lord’s vacant seat when he mistakenly stepped over the royal pillow. The vassals conferred and reported to the sovereign, “Upon consideration of precedent, [it is clear that] this is no minor offense. Nevertheless, as it occurred as a result of an error, the penalty of death shall be commuted one degree, to distant exile.” The vassals had no choice but to exile Ci-tong to a place called Li-xian, deep in the mountains.

This Li-xian was 300 miles from the royal castle, deep in the mountains where even birds did not cry; clouds loomed darkly and tigers and wolves ran rampant. If one were to enter this mountain, there was no chance of coming back alive. King Mu felt pity for Ci-tong and, taking two verses from the “Broad Gate Chapter” of the *Lotus Sūtra*, secretly bestowed them on Ci-tong, telling him, “Every morning, bow once to each of the ten directions, and recite these verses.” Then Ci-tong was exiled to Li-xian, abandoned at the bottom of a deep valley in the mountains. Here Ci-tong, in obedience to the kind command, recited these verses once every morning. But he worried that he would forget them, so he wrote out the passages on the lower leaves of chrysanthemums growing nearby. When dew forming on the leaves of these chrysanthemums trickled into the river that ran through the valley, all of the water became a magical heavenly elixir. Struck by thirst, Ci-tong drank; the water tasted like ambrosia and better than a hundred delicacies.

Moreover, heavenly beings came to offer him flowers, and since gods and demons folded their arms to render service to him, he lost his fear of wild beasts such as the tigers and wolves, and his body changed into that of a wizard. Furthermore, of more than 300 households of people who drank the valley water downstream, all were cured of their illnesses and lived to be 100 years old without aging.

The times passed, and after more than 800 years Ci-tong still looked like a boy, and showed no signs of aging. During the reign of Emperor Wen of Wei, he changed his name to Peng-zu, and offered this magic to Emperor Wen. Emperor Wen received it and was given a chrysanthemum cup and a blessing for 10,000 years of life. This corresponds today to the banquet held on the ninth day of the ninth month.

Since then, whenever a crown prince receives the throne from heaven, he first learns these verses. Therefore the “Broad Gate Chapter” should be called the king of all sūtras. This text was transmitted to our realm, and generations of virtuous sovereigns have learned it on the day of their enthronement. When a young sovereign is installed, the regent first receives the verses and makes sure to transmit them to the sovereign upon the commencement of his reign. These eight verses passed through three countries to become a means of ruling the nation and pacifying the people, an essential method for avoiding disaster and bringing about joy.

This is all the result of King Mu’s heavenly horses. Therefore the arrival of these “dragon horses” is absolutely a sign of prosperity for the Buddhist way and for the royal way, and of great longevity for the throne. (Gotō and Kamada 1961, 13–15; author’s translation)

At this point, the reader might expect to be informed of the antecedent Chinese texts in which the story of Ci-tong and King Mu appears. There is none. Rather, as Itō Masayoshi was the first to show, this tale appears to have been created by Japanese Tendai monks in order to explain the use of certain Buddhist elements—mudrās and chanted verses from the *Lotus Sūtra*—in imperial accession ceremonies.<sup>8</sup>

Itō cites in its entirety the text *Tendai-kata no gosokui hō* (Tendai Methods for Conducting Accession Ceremonies), whose colophon states that it was copied by Shun’yū, aged twenty-nine, concluding on Shōchō 2.3.17 (1429).<sup>9</sup> It provides details found in the play but not in the *Taiheiki* or *Sangoku denki* versions of the tale. In the *Taiheiki*, the *jidō* legend is appropriated to explain

<sup>8</sup>See Itō Masayoshi (1980). Itō’s discovery was further extended and amplified by Abe Yasurō (1984a, 1984b).

<sup>9</sup>Shun’yū was a student of Dōshō, a monk who was also a priest at the Ise Shrine; the two are known for producing copies of the Shinto classics and commentaries. See Abe (1998, 200).

an omen; in the Tendai text, it explains why these verses from the *Lotus Sūtra* are transmitted to a crown prince upon ascending the throne.

The significance of Itō's discovery is that it locates the Tendai Buddhist monks (with deep interests in the ties between Shinto and Buddhist beliefs) as the originators and creators of the *jidō* legends. It seems fair to speculate that the verses were part of the accession ritual before the *jidō* legend was created in order to justify their inclusion. The earliest verifiable instance of an emperor performing this ritual (also called the *sokui kanjō*, or accession initiation) dates to 1288 (Kamikawa 1990, 251).

The implications of the equivalences are intriguing. In the *jidō* legend, the youth is the beloved of the Chinese king. He transgresses the law and is exiled by the king's ministers. To protect him, the king breaks his own obligation to keep the verses secret and shares them with the boy. Not only is the boy's life saved, but also the villagers downstream from him enjoy long life, and he is able to return the verses to the reigning emperor centuries later, after they have been lost.

It is clear that the *jidō* of the legend and the *chigo* of the *chigo* tales (and of real life) are the same figure. They differ, however, insofar as the *jidō* retains his youthful beauty forever, in contrast to the destiny of the *chigo*. Perhaps here we find a monk's deepest wish granted: that the youth who enlivens his banquet and warms his bed stay young forever. We also see another familiar theme from the *chigo* tales: a beautiful youth placed in harm's way. In the *jidō* legend, the *Lotus Sūtra* enables the boy's hero lover to protect him, even though they are many miles apart. King Mu is both a secular sovereign and a Buddhist adept, but it is his personal transmission from the Buddha himself that allows him to protect the youth from the punishment doled out by his secular ministers.

What are we to make of the implicit equivalences? In the *jidō* legend, the Buddha transmits eight verses to King Mu, who gives two to the boy, who, in turn, returns the verses to a later emperor. Are we to assume that the Japanese emperor inherits them from the later (Chinese) emperor? Or are we to infer a separate transmission? In that case, is not the person who transmits the verses and *mudrā* to the crown prince before he becomes emperor—a high-ranking Tendai monk or imperial regent—equivalent to King Mu, and the crown prince equivalent to the *jidō*? Or should we regard the transmitter as the Buddha, and the crown prince as King Mu?

Kamikawa Michio emphasizes the agency of the crown prince in performing the accession ritual and says that the new emperor is an incarnation of the buddha Dainichi Nyorai, outside of and superior to the Buddhist clerical hierarchy. He references Western equivalents, namely, medieval ceremonies in which secular kings were anointed with oil by popes, which undermined the king's authority. What he really seems to be saying is that, like Napoleon, the medieval Japanese emperor crowned himself. Kamikawa stresses that "it was the emperor alone who performed the rite, and the regent's role was limited

to transmitting the *mudrā* and *dhāraṇī*" (1990, 271) in an attempt to reject the assumption that the regent played an active role in the accession ritual. But when we view the ritual through the lens of the *jidō* legend, the simple act of transmitting the secret items to the emperor puts the transmitter in a position of higher status than the receiver, unless the transmitter is equivalent to the *chigo* and the crown prince equivalent to the later Chinese emperor. Moreover, as Kamikawa notes (1990, 271), the transmission was originally conducted not by the regent but by a high-ranking monk. The monks' creation of the *jidō* legend is really quite astute. By placing the emphasis on transmission, they ensure their importance even if the regents supplant them in conducting the ritual (which they did). The rivalry between the aristocrats (centered upon the regent) and the clerical authorities for proximity to the emperor is one of Kamikawa's themes, and it is hard to get much closer than the accession ritual.

If we read more closely into the *jidō* legend, we see the tension between the regents and the abbots manifested in the unsympathetic portrayal of Mu's ministers. The supreme figure in the story is the Buddha himself, to whom King Mu is subordinate. We may be inclined to believe that the new Japanese emperor is equivalent to King Mu, and he is—but only after the accession ritual. As crown prince, he is the *jidō* who receives the verses to protect him from the ministers; he is the beloved *chigo* of the Tendai monks. Thus, the Buddhist clergy inscribed the figure of the *chigo* into the historical record, and by implicitly associating the *chigo* with the new emperor (via the *jidō*), they kept a place for themselves close to the center of imperial prestige and, at the same time, continued an ongoing project, also seen in the *chigo* tales, of increasing the legitimacy of the *chigo* system.

#### YANG GUIFEI

Now that we have grasped the origins of the *jidō* story, it may be helpful to broaden our view and think comparatively in order to understand the function of the *jidō* in its context. Specifically, there are striking similarities between the *jidō* legend and the story of the Tang imperial consort Yang Guifei (719–56), a historical figure who was immortalized in the lines of Bo Juyi's "Song of Everlasting Sorrow" (*Chang hen ge*).

As told by the poet, the Tang emperor Xuanzong (685–762; r. 712–56) becomes infatuated with a young daughter of the Yang family, a girl of extraordinary beauty raised far from the eyes of men. (According to "An Account of 'The Song of Everlasting Sorrow'" [*Chang hen ge chuan*], a companion narrative by Bo's friend Chen Hong, she had already been admitted to the imperial harem, which included thousands of other women, and become the wife of an imperial prince before her husband's father discovered her and took her for himself.) Enthralled by her beauty, the emperor wants nothing to do with the other women in the harem and stops attending court, too tired from nights of lovemaking. Eventually, many of the Yang clan are

assigned to official posts as a result of the influence of the emperor's favorite concubine, called Yang Guifei, or "Yang the Prized Consort." This neglect of official affairs gradually takes its toll: An Lushan (705–57), Yang Guifei's adopted son, rises up in revolt and forces the emperor to abandon the capital with his entourage, escorted by loyal troops. At the Ma-wei post station, the troops demand the death of Yang Guifei, who is strangled on the spot. The loyalist cause eventually triumphs, crushing the rebellion, but the emperor is not to be consoled. He consults a Taoist wizard, who manages to locate Yang Guifei at Peng-lai, the island of the immortals. She, too, has been plunged into grief but gives the wizard some mementos as proof that he has found her. She also divulges in the way of evidence a secret vow she and the emperor made.<sup>10</sup>

The similarities between Yang Guifei and the *jidō* are readily discerned. In each case, a Chinese sovereign is captivated by the beauty and charms of a favorite, who causes him to neglect his official duties. Those surrounding the sovereign, upon whom he relies for assistance, demand the removal of the enchanting favorite, and the sovereign has no choice but to comply. The beloved becomes a semi-divine figure.

Of course there are differences, too—the *jidō* suffers exile and lives youthfully ever after, whereas Yang Guifei is violently murdered, leaving the emperor obsessively distraught. (I find the difference in gender almost irrelevant; more important is the difference in age between the lover and beloved. Yang Guifei was thirty-four years younger than Emperor Xuanzong.) The story of Yang Guifei would make a good *chigo* tale with a few alterations. Indeed, Bo Juyi was extremely popular in pre-modern Japan, and "The Song of Everlasting Sorrow" was the most famous of his works. It inspired the fifteenth-century *noh* play *Yang Guifei* (*Yōkihi*) and is referred to or alluded to in countless works of poetry and narrative.<sup>11</sup>

In the *jidō* legend, the *jidō*'s crime is that of effacing the boundary between sovereign and subject by stepping over the king's pillow. But what enables such an act to take place is the king's excessive fondness for the youth. This is also the message of the story of Yang Guifei. In Japan, during the period in which retired emperors wielded great power, it was common for them to bestow lavish political favors upon young male favorites (Gomi 1984, 416–41). One such example is the relationship between the retired emperor Go-Shirakawa (1127–92) and the courtier Fujiwara no Nobuyori (1133–59). The Tendai abbot Jien wrote that Go-Shirakawa was "shockingly fond" of Nobuyori.<sup>12</sup> *The Tale of the Heiji Era* (*Heiji monogatari*) criticizes Nobuyori for unseemly behavior, saying that he "even exceeded Mi Tzu-hsia and went beyond An Lu-shan. He feared not the

<sup>10</sup>Translations of *Chang hen ge* and *Chang hen ge chuan* may be found in Stephen Owen (1996, 442–52). The poem appears in the fourth book of "Laments" (*ganshang*) in Bo's collected works.

<sup>11</sup>For an overview of the reception of *Chang hen ge* in Japan, see Shinma Kazuyoshi (1993). See also Masako Nakagawa Graham (1998). On *Yōkihi*, see Atkins (2006, 165–74).

<sup>12</sup>The quote is from Jien's classic historical work *Gukanshō* (Brown and Ishida 1979, 106).



‘crime of [offering] the remainder of a peach.’”<sup>13</sup> The reference alludes to a passage in the Chinese classic *Han Feizi* in which the presumptuous Mi Zixia enjoys the favor and indulgence of Duke Ling of Wei, even going so far as to borrow his carriage and offer him a half-eaten peach.<sup>14</sup> At first the duke pardons such affronts, but later, as Zixia’s beauty fades, they are summoned as examples of his arrogance. Eventually Nobuyori’s rival, Shinzei (Fujiwara no Michinori, d. 1159), attempts to remonstrate with Go-Shirakawa by presenting him with three scrolls of text and a picture of An Lushan in order to demonstrate how arrogance leads to ruin (Nagazumi and Shimada 1967, 192). But Go-Shirakawa’s affection for Nobuyori is said to have increased all the more. (Eventually Nobuyori and Shinzei faced off with military backing in the Heiji Rebellion; Nobuyori was taken prisoner and executed, and Shinzei killed himself in order to evade capture.) In my view, Shinzei saw Nobuyori as An Lushan and Yang Guifei rolled into one: the minister who manipulated the emperor’s affections for his own political benefit.

In some of the *chigo* tales, the *chigo* is revealed in the end as an avatar of some supernatural being, most often the bodhisattva Kannon. Yang Guifei was regarded in medieval Japan as a Taoist immortal who took human form temporarily to console Emperor Xuanzong, whose favorite consort had died shortly before he met Yang Guifei (Wang 1994). Moreover, the Shingon temple Sennyūji of Kyoto includes among its treasures a statue that is said to be Kannon in the form of Yang Guifei. It was brought back from Song China by the monk Tankai in 1230 (Konno 1990, 238, 250). Like the dead *chigo*, Yang was sent to the human realm for a reason.

By juxtaposing the story of Yang Guifei against the *jidō* legends and *chigo* tales, we can see a larger pattern emerge. Both Yang Guifei and the *jidō* are scapegoat figures, singled out for punishment because the real culprit—the emperor or king who permitted his affections to interfere with the governance of the realm—is beyond reproach. The comparative approach thus leads us to an anthropological one in which the *chigo* tales and *jidō* legend shed light not only upon the cultural systems of medieval Japan but also on human nature and its expression through creative discourse. For example, the enigma of why the *jidō*’s stepping over King Mu’s pillow was regarded as such a grave offense is unraveled when we recognize that stepping over certain objects has been regarded as taboo in many cultures (Frazer 1951, 423–25). James Frazer, in his classic work *The Golden Bough*, devotes an entire volume to taboo; the *jidō* legends should be viewed in the context of this broader system of prohibition and transgression.

<sup>13</sup>Translation by Edwin O. Reischauer in Reischauer and Joseph K. Yamagiwa (1972, 293). For the original, see Nagazumi Yasuaki and Shimada Isao (1967, 190, 328 n. 7).

<sup>14</sup>For a translation, see Burton Watson (1964, 78). The original may be found in Takeuchi Teruo (1960, 152–53).

## SCAPEGOAT THEORY

So often, as in the case of Oedipus, the violator of a taboo (incest and patricide) is subjected to punishment (exile). But in the scapegoat theory of René Girard, in many cases the purported transgressor is an innocent victim who is falsely accused. For the remainder of this essay, I would like to attempt a reading of the *chigo*, *jidō*, and similar narratives informed in part by Girard's thought, as outlined in his groundbreaking study *Violence and the Sacred* (1977) and amplified in *The Scapegoat* (1986). To begin with the conclusion, I propose that the archetypal resonances of these narratives, which tantalize us with hidden meanings and symbolism, may be partially unraveled by considering the *chigo*, the *jidō*, and Yang Guifei as sacrificial figures or scapegoats. That is to say, they are specially selected as surrogate victims of socially sanctioned violence whose role is to deflect or absorb violence that would otherwise tear apart the community. Girard states that the purpose of sacrifice is "to restore harmony to the community, to reinforce the social fabric," suppressing various kinds of "internal violence" (1977, 8).

In Girard's view, violence arises not because of difference but because of similarity. Competitors come into conflict because they both desire the same thing: "Order, peace, and fecundity depend on cultural distinctions; it is not these distinctions but the loss of them that gives birth to fierce rivalries and sets members of the same family or social group at one another's throats" (1977, 49). This desire is typically mimetic, which is to say, it is motivated not by the intrinsic worth or attractiveness of the thing or person desired but by the simple fact that the other party desires it. This leads to violence, which propagates itself through the imitation of reprisals in an eternal cycle.

Modern societies have legal systems that assert a monopoly upon the use of violence to settle disputes, but primitive societies, including ancient Western cultures, relied on sacrificial violence. According to Girard, analysis of numerous mythical and literary texts (his main sources are ancient Greek drama and mythology, the Old and New Testaments, Shakespeare, and ethnological reports) shows that time and time again, an innocent victim was selected and subjected to an act of collective violence, after which the communal crisis subsided. In Girard's words,

Each time an oral or written testament mentions an act of violence that is directly or indirectly collective we question whether it includes the description of a social or cultural crisis, that is, a generalized loss of differences (the first stereotype), crimes that "eliminate differences" (the second stereotype), and whether the identified authors of these crimes possess the marks that suggest a victim, the paradoxical marks of the absence of difference (the third stereotype). The fourth stereotype is violence itself, which will be discussed later.

The juxtaposition of more than one stereotype within a single document indicates persecution. Not all the stereotypes must be present:

three are enough and often even two. Their existence convinces us that (1) the acts of violence are real; (2) the crisis is real; (3) the victims are chosen not for the crimes they are accused of but for the victim's signs that they bear, for everything that suggests their guilty relationship with the crisis; and (4) the import of the operation is to lay the responsibility for the crisis on the victims and to exert an influence on it by destroying these victims or at least by banishing them from the community they "pollute." (1986, 24)

Previous work on the *chigo* and *jidō* has hinted at such an approach. Faure recounts the tale of one *chigo* who drowns himself in a pond after being separated from his master; the *chigo* is later venerated as an avatar of Monju. Faure calls it "a suicide turned into sacrifice, a kind of Girardian scapegoat" and aptly asks, "Does not their divinization perhaps simply reflect the fact that they served as victims?" (1998, 274). Even before Faure, Abe Yasurō recognized the role of the *jidō* as scapegoat. He cites other versions of the *jidō* legend in which it is the first Qin emperor, not King Mu, who "puts aside the empress" and becomes infatuated with his boy attendant. As a result, the boy abandons all show of deference to courtiers and ministers, incurring the disapproval of the emperor's subjects. The destruction of the order of the state by "sexual debauchery" reaches its climax when the boy steps over (or, in some versions, breaks) the emperor's pillow. "Then the boy takes the blame for the crime of causing the confusion of the normal order described above, and is exiled to Mt. Li-xian as a so-called 'lamb of atonement' (*shokuzai no hitsuji*)" (Abe 1984b, 51–52; author's translation). At this point, Abe heads off on a different track, recalling that the very act that saves the boy and guarantees a happy ending—the granting of secret verses to him that were reserved for the exclusive use of the sovereign—is itself the violation of another prerogative (the Buddha's). To Abe, this is another manifestation of Tendai *hongakuron* (theories on innate enlightenment), in which good and evil are false categories.

It takes little imagination to see that the *jidō* is, in fact, a substitute victim. The ministers cannot depose the emperor, so they use the legal system to subject his beloved favorite to severe punishment. The same is true of Yang Guifei: Her death is the penalty that Xuanzong pays for having neglected his duties. In the *jidō* legend, it is not the return of the verses to the latter sovereign that restores order but the exile of the *jidō* himself. In the story of Yang Guifei especially, there is an actual crisis—the rebellion of An Lushan—that precipitates the execution of Yang Guifei, who is singled out for all the problems that have beset the realm. She is physically distinguished by her extreme beauty.

But how might the protagonists of the *chigo* tales, or the *chigo* who populate historical records, have functioned as surrogate victims? First, they functioned as sexual surrogates for women, whose presence inside a monastic community would have been regarded as polluting, raised suspicion among the laity, and led to internal conflict. Indeed, as Girard notes, "Like violence, sexual desire tends

to fasten upon surrogate objects if the object to which it was originally attracted remains inaccessible; it willingly accepts substitutes" (1977, 35).

Are the *chigo* really surrogate victims of violence? And, if so, what is the original target of that violence? It does seem that the *chigo* leads an abnormally imperiled existence. In the three tales I have summarized here, the *chigo* are caught up in violence between other parties. Specifically, the *chigo* of "A Long Tale for an Autumn Night" gets caught up in the real battles between the monks of Hiei and Miidera. When he disappears, the monks of Miidera immediately suspect that Hiei has been involved; interestingly, they first attack the boy's father, and then they build an ordination platform to provoke Hiei; they are aware that a direct attack on Hiei would be futile. Neither the Miidera monks nor the Hiei monks attack the *chigo*, but his suicide is a collateral result of the destruction of his temple. Like the destruction of the temple, the death of the *chigo* is cited as a blessing in disguise that leads others to form karmic links with the Buddhist teachings. After receiving the teaching of Shinra Daimyōjin in a dream, the Miidera monks are persuaded not to seek retaliation; Hiei's actions are not a slight to be repaid but part of a broader divine plan. The *chigo*'s suicide, which is precipitated by his feelings of guilt at having contributed to the conflict that led to the destruction of Miidera, is reinterpreted and thereby ends the cycle of violence. As for the four stereotypes, we have a crisis in the ongoing rivalry between Hiei and Miidera, a victim who is physically distinctive, and perhaps an act of collective violence (one wonders whether the kidnapping of the *chigo* was real, and the suicide not—that is to say, could the *chigo* have been abducted and murdered by the monks of Hiei?). The *chigo* is not accused, however, of any crime.

In "The Tale of Genmu," the *chigo*'s father is killed by a rival; the *chigo* participates in the cycle of violence by avenging the murder and is then murdered himself. The cycle, however, stops there, for the *chigo* has no heir to avenge him. His murderer meets the *chigo*'s distraught lover, and the two pursue their devotions together. Here also, the unnatural death of the *chigo* plays an important role in reconciling enemies and ending the cycle of retribution. It is precisely because he is a manifestation of a bodhisattva that his death need not (and must not) be avenged. The posthumous deification of the *chigo* enables a cessation of cyclical violence. In this tale we have no general crisis, nor an act of collective violence, but we do have a physically distinctive victim who is killed (after killing his father's killer).

In "The Mountain," the *chigo* dies a natural death in the end. During his lifetime, however, he is subjected to violence by his stepmother: First she cuts off his hair, which brings about his self-exile to Kumano. Then she sends her son-in-law, the monk Raikan, to kill the former *chigo*, but Raikan is himself killed in the process, the stepmother's plot is discovered, and she and her daughter are expelled. What is most interesting about the stepmother's method is her targeting of the *chigo*'s hair—the aspect of his appearance that makes him most like her own daughter. By cutting his hair, she differentiates him from her daughter and temporarily avoids a conflict. When the *chigo* returns later as an adult male, Raikan, the

stepmother's son-in-law, is sent to kill him. Raikan and Gen'i, the former *chigo*'s lover, meet in mortal combat, mirror images of each other. Raikan is the husband of the stepmother's daughter, Gen'i the "husband" of the minister's son. Later, when Gen'i kills Raikan, precautions must be taken to allay the wrath of the Nara monks, lest they rise up in defense of one of their own. The specter of violence between the Hiei and Nara monks hovers in the background of "The Mountain"; fortunately, it is never realized, perhaps because of the role of the two lovers as buffers between the two sides. In fact, it could be argued that in "The Mountain," the sacrificial victim is not the *chigo* but the stepmother. Of low birth, she is accused of transgressive acts (cutting the *chigo*'s hair, plotting to murder her stepson) and later expelled from the community, an act that restores order and ends the internal violence. (This is not accomplished by the death of Raikan; it is the stepmother's envy of the *chigo* that causes the crisis.)

In the *jidō* legend, the youth is a surrogate victim for the emperor. On the other hand, in the *chigo* tales, the *chigo*'s function is often to "absorb" violence in order to prevent its spread between families or rival temples. As a liminal figure—neither child nor adult, neither male nor female—the *chigo* is exquisitely positioned as a victim. Girard's remarks on the role of women as sacrificial victims seem equally apt in the case of the *chigo*: "Like the animal and the infant, but to a lesser degree, the woman qualifies for sacrificial status by reason of her weakness and relatively marginal social status. That is why she can be viewed as a quasi-sacred figure, both desired and disdained, alternately elevated and abused" (1977, 141–42). The paradox of the *chigo* being subjected to violence and, at the same time, deified in the *chigo* tales, or being fêted and simultaneously used to satisfy forbidden sexual desires in real life, turns out not to be no paradox at all. He is a sacred victim who in fiction converts violence into divine will and in the abbot's bedchamber converts the violation of monastic precepts against sexual contact into sublime ritual and communion with the sacred.

## CONCLUSION

In the end, how are we to read the *chigo* tales? Are they a "euphemization of exploitation through a mystical discourse" and possibly "a rather crude ideological cover-up for a kind of institutionalized prostitution or rape," as Faure contends? (1998, 275, 265). Do they illustrate the nonduality of good and evil, as Abe suggests? Or, as Childs claims, is the entire genre category itself suspect, "the result of a modern view of homosexuality as an aberrant behavior" that "ignores the prominence of the religious awakening aspect" (1991, 26) of the tales?<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup>I define *chigo monogatari* as tales in which *chigo* play a major role and include in my list above "The New Servant Is a *Chigo*," in which the *chigo*'s love interest is female. Other interpretations of the *chigo* tales include the view of Richard K. Payne (1999) that "A Long Tale for an Autumn Night" portrays a midlife transition that is culturally universal.

My focus in this essay has been not on the *chigo* as demigods or as sex toys (which is not to say that *chigo* did not fulfill these functions) but as victims of real and imagined violence, whether carried out by others or by themselves. By expanding *chigo* discourse to include the *jidō* legends and literary accounts of Yang Guifei, we may observe that the role of the *chigo* may have been to absorb violence and to restore harmony to the community, which is generally consonant with the function of the surrogate sacrificial victim in Girard's theory of collective violence. Taking a hint from Girard's association of sexuality with violence (1977, 34–36), should we perhaps then conclude that the historical role of the *chigo* as a focus of erotic attention was to absorb the sexual desires of their clerical masters so that they would not be directed externally (toward women) or internally (against each other)?

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# The New Lady-in-Waiting Is a *Chigo*: Sexual Fluidity and Dual Transvestism in a Medieval Buddhist Acolyte Tale

Sachi Schmidt-Hori

## 1. An Introduction to *Chigo imamai*

A handful of tales were written in medieval Japan about *chigo*, Buddhist acolytes who acted as catamites in pederastic relationships with their master monks.<sup>1</sup> Among these, the Muromachi tale *Chigo imamai* 稚児今参り (The new lady-in-waiting is a *chigo*) provides a particularly interesting view into the workings of gender and sexuality in medieval Japanese society.<sup>2</sup> Unlike other *chigo monogatari* (acolyte tales), the protagonist of *Chigo imamai* breaks the pattern of male-male relationships, falling in love with the teenage daughter of a high-ranking courtier. Furthermore, the *chigo* takes extreme measures to pursue this young lady and consummate their relationship by posing as a beautiful female attendant. Offering a unique perspective onto medieval Japan's tolerance of a range of human sexualities and sexual practices, *Chigo imamai* is an edifying piece for the modern reader.

In the following I provide an annotated translation of *Chigo imamai*. To prepare readers for the text, I offer in the following sections an overview of the literary genre of acolyte tales, situating it in the Japanese literary tradition and underscoring the representative themes and plots. This is followed by a discussion of issues particular to *Chigo imamai*, including its textual variants, plot, depiction of the characters—especially from the aspect of gender and sexuality—and problems of translation.

### 1.1. The Initiation Ritual for the *Chigo*

From medieval times through the early modern period, pederasty was a prevalent practice among clergy, noblemen, feudal lords, and wealthy merchants.<sup>3</sup> Despite their vow of celibacy, high-ranking Buddhist

monks' sexual relationships with *chigo* were not clandestine, as evidenced by the great corpus of extant love poems written by abbots and archbishops for their beloved *chigo*, some of which are compiled in imperial *waka* anthologies.<sup>4</sup>

These adolescent boys were far more than ordinary temple minions. To receive the title of *chigo*, a boy had to undergo a weeks-long initiation ritual called the *chigo kanjō* 稚児灌頂, through which he was reborn as a bodhisattva. This sacralization meant that sexual intercourse with a *chigo* provided the Buddhist master with virtues, rather than with disdain for breaking his vow of celibacy. We can today imagine how the *chigo kanjō* was conducted centuries ago from the minutely depicted illustration of the rite in the 20th-century short story "Chigo." Written by the novelist and Tendai abbot Kon Tōkō 今東光 (1898–1977), the description of the *chigo kanjō* is based on the Tendai school's *Kō chigo shōgyō hiden* 弘児聖教秘伝 (Great esoteric Buddhist teachings on *Chigo*).<sup>5</sup> The one-and-a-half page narration of the initiation begins with the preliminary austerities that a boy named Hanawaka practices in seclusion seventeen days prior to the ritual. On the day of the initiation, Master Renshū chants the name of Kannon five hundred times, recites the Five Great Vows, and teaches various holy gestures and mantras to the *chigo*-to-be. Subsequently, Hanawaka's appearance is transformed into that of a *chigo*, androgenized with blackened teeth, powdered face, and exquisite attire; thenceforth he is acknowledged to be the great merciful bodhisattva, Kannon.<sup>6</sup> Later that night, Master Ransū finalizes the holy rite by penetrating the new *chigo* in his chamber, and they pledge unconditional love that will last for two lifetimes.<sup>7</sup>

How is the *chigo*, the sacred boy and the object of pederasty, then, depicted in medieval prose fiction? In the next section, I discuss what constitutes and characterizes *chigo monogatari* as a part of medieval short prose fiction, commonly known as *otogi-zōshi* 御伽草子.

## 1.2. *Chigo monogatari*: The Genre

Acolyte tales are a sub-group of the literary genre *otogi-zōshi* 御伽草子. The term *otogi-zōshi* originally comes from the proper noun *Otogi bunko* 御伽文庫 (companion library), a set of twenty-three short narratives from the Kamakura and Muromachi periods compiled and published with illustrations during the Kyōhō 享保 era (1716–1736) by the Osaka publisher Shibukawa Seiemon 渋川清右衛門. In the late 19th century, the term began to refer to the entire corpus of short prose fiction produced

during the medieval period. Alternative appellations for *otogi-zōshi* are *Muromachi jidai monogatari* (Muromachi period tales) and *chūsei shōsetsu* (medieval novels).<sup>8</sup>

In his *Chūsei shōsetsu no kenkyū* 中世小説の研究 (A study on medieval novels), Ichiko Teiji 市古貞次 divides medieval narratives, which he calls *shōsetsu*, into six categories: courtier novels, monk/religious novels, warrior novels, commoner novels, foreign country novels, and non-human novels (*irui shosetsu* 異類小説).<sup>9</sup> Within these six groups, *chigo monogatari* is included in the monk/religious novels, defined as “novels in which the protagonist is a *chigo* and the story takes place at a Buddhist temple,” and “often pertaining to *nanshoku* 男色 (male-male sexuality).”<sup>10</sup> Ichiko’s definition of *chigo monogatari*, now over a half-century old, has been problematized in Margaret H. Childs’s 1980 article for its uneven focus on the romantic relationships while neglecting the religious import.<sup>11</sup>

In more recent scholarship, Hamanaka Osamu 濱中修 (2002) points out that *chigo monogatari* in fact underwent stages in which different themes were present, from an inclination to being highly religious and less romantic to tending to be less religious and highly romantic.<sup>12</sup> Two of the earliest extant works, *Kōzuke no Kimi shōshoku* 上野君消息 (The letter from Kōzuke no Kimi; ca. late Kamakura period)<sup>13</sup> and *Chigo Kannon engi* 稚児観音縁起 (The Story of Kannon’s manifestation as a *chigo*; ca. late Kamakura period),<sup>14</sup> connote strong religious messages, featuring *chigo* as avatars of bodhisattvas, who descended to the human world to bestow religious awakenings upon the young monks. Hamanaka (2002) states that they were “yet to be fully matured as love stories,” although an amorous relationship between the *chigo* and the monk is assumed in the plot.<sup>15</sup>

As the prime of *chigo monogatari* production appeared *Aki no yo no nagamonogatari* 秋夜長物語 (The long tale for an autumn night), a story acclaimed to be the “archetypical masterpiece” of all *chigo monogatari*.<sup>16</sup> In this story, an aspiring Enryakuji monk, Keikai, falls in love with a *chigo* of Miidera (Onjōji) named Umewaka. Soon after pledging their unconditional love for each other, a tragic fate strikes the two. First, Umewaka is kidnapped by a goblin (*tengu* 天狗), causing the priests of his home temple to wrongly accuse Keikai for the disappearance of their beloved *chigo*. As a result, a violent conflict breaks out between the two religious powerhouses, reducing Miidera to ashes.<sup>17</sup> Although Umewaka manages to escape captivity, he winds up drowning himself out of excru-

ciating guilt for the sufferings he caused to his loved ones. In the end, the reader learns that, as in the cases of *Kōzuke no Kimi shōshoku* and *Chigo Kannon engi*, Umewaka actually was a manifestation of Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion, who was reborn in the form of a *chigo* to teach Keikai the impermanence of carnal passions and to bring him back to the true Way of Buddha.

Interestingly, whether the *chigo* is a deity or human, he is often destined to encounter a tragic fate in the stories. In his study on ten acolyte tales, Paul S. Atkins (2008) identified numerous sufferings that the *chigo* endures: kidnapping (*Aki no yo no nagamonogatari*, *Chigo imamai*), a false accusation (*Hanamitsu* 花みつ), cutting off of hair (*Ashibiki* あしびき [The mountain]), attempted or actual murder (*Genmu monogatari* 幻夢物語 [The tale of Genmu], *Ashibiki*), death (*Toribeyama monogatari* 鳥部山物語 [The tale of Mount Toribe], *Ben no sōshi* 弁草紙 [The tale of Ben], *Chigo Kannon engi*), and suicide (*Aki no yo no nagamonogatari*, *Hanamitsu*).<sup>18</sup>

Atkins's study is groundbreaking in the attention it pays to the tragic circumstances in the stories, particularly the violence against the *chigo*. He aptly adopts René Girard's scapegoat theory, first introduced in *Violence and the Sacred* (1977), and analyzes the construction of the *chigo* along with other literary figures as

sacrificial figures or scapegoats. That is to say, they are specially selected as surrogate victims of socially sanctioned violence whose role is to deflect or absorb violence that would otherwise tear apart the community. Girard states that the purpose of sacrifices is "to restore harmony to the community, to reinforce the social fabric," suppressing various kinds of "internal violence" (1977, 8).<sup>19</sup>

As the creation of *chigo monogatari* continued, however, this tragic tendency, along with overt religious didacticism, began to fade away, and works of a more secular, romantic nature were composed. *Chigo imamai* is one example of this later variety, and this particular tale offers us a novel way to understand the *chigo* tradition.

### 1.3. *Chigo imamai*: A Secular Tale of the *Chigo*

*Chigo imamai* dramatically differs from the rest of the acolyte tales in its relative lack of religiosity, happy ending, want of violence, and the hero's heterosexuality. As the brief plot summary below illustrates, the pivot of *Chigo imamai* primarily is the courtship of the *chigo*, suggesting its creation in the final stage of the genre.

One early spring day, a *chigo* of Enryakuji spies a beautiful young lady (Himegimi 姫君) at the residence of the Minister of the Center and falls in love with her at first sight.<sup>20</sup> Lovesick, the *chigo* postpones his return to Mount Hiei, instead spending a few days at his former wet nurse's home in Uji. In order to help her young master, the wet nurse decides to dress the *chigo* in women's clothing and send him to the mansion as a new lady-in-waiting for Himegimi.

Closely attending Himegimi, the *chigo*'s adoration for her intensifies day by day, which eventually leads him to confess his true identity and motive for coming to the mansion. Moved by his extraordinary passion, Himegimi gradually comes to love him in return, and she soon finds herself pregnant. Already engaged to marry the crown prince, Himegimi is devastated; at the very least this indiscretion will mean the end of her father's career. To make matters worse, the *chigo* is kidnapped by a band of goblins. In despair, Himegimi escapes from her home and wanders about the mountains. There she meets a "nun goblin" (*ama-tengu* 尼天狗), the mother of the *chigo*'s kidnappers. Soon afterwards, the young couple reunites when the nun goblin sacrifices her life to save them.

At the house of the *chigo*'s wet nurse in Uji, Himegimi gives birth to a baby boy. Through the help of various people, the couple and their young son are now welcomed into the minister's mansion. Following a splendid memorial service for the nun goblin, the *chigo* has a dream in which he envisions her attaining salvation. In the end, everyone in the family is blessed with happiness and everlasting prosperity.

The secular nature of *Chigo imamai* is observed in the lack of overtly pro-Buddhist messages (e.g., impermanence of this-worldly attachment, self-sacrifice of the *chigo*-deity) and the subtle mockery of the Enryakuji abbot. Although the abbot is portrayed as a caring guardian of the *chigo*, he also appears as a less-than-sagacious figure who gloats over the effect of his prayers upon the news of Himegimi's discovery, even though it is actually the nun goblin who has rescued Himegimi and the abbot's beloved *chigo*. Furthermore, this non-religious quality of *Chigo imamai* may point to lay authorship, and it seems very likely that the laity was the target audience. Lay authorship of *Chigo imamai* would be a particularly strong indication of tolerance and acceptance by the secular community of such pederastic sexual practices among the clergy.

#### 1.4. Influence from Other Works

Whereas the hero of *Chigo imamai* as the victim of the kidnapping by goblins seems to be a direct influence from *Aki no yo no nagamonogatari*, in terms of the general structure of the story, this acolyte tale in fact bears a closer resemblance to the structure of *shūgi mono* 祝儀物

(auspicious tales). *Shūgi mono* is another sub-genre of *otogi-zōshi*, with the best-known examples including *Bunshō sōshi* 文正草子,<sup>21</sup> *Issun bōshi* 一寸法師,<sup>22</sup> and *Monogusa Tarō* ものぐさ太郎.<sup>23</sup> In these tales, the hero overcomes hardship, often with the help of a supernatural being, and attains wealth, happiness, and prosperity in the end. Also, the vagabond of *Monogusa Tarō* and the hero of *Chigo imamai* are similar in that they are both orphans whose noble genealogy is revealed in the end.

Suzuki Hiromichi 鈴木弘道 (1950), on the other hand, argues that the cross-dressing of the hero of *Chigo imamai* indicates this work's significant influence from the famous late-Heian tale *Torikaebaya monogatari* とりかへばや物語 (The changelings), the story of a brother and a sister whose genders were switched at a young age.<sup>24</sup> Although it is possible that the author of *Chigo imamai* was familiar with the plot of *Torikaebaya*, the cross-dressing of the *chigo*—a strategically used temporary disguise—appears fundamentally different from that of Himegimi in *Torikaebaya*, the son of an aristocratic family who lived his life as a woman.

Rather, I would argue that the *chigo*'s cross-dressing, intended to fabricate an encounter with his female love interest, bears a striking similarity to an anecdotal tale compiled in *Kokon chomonjū* 古今著聞集 (1254). The tale is titled, "How a monk was enthralled by a nun with a pledge of lifelong celibacy, and earned her love after waiting on her as a woman," and may be summarized as follows.

One day, a Buddhist monk sees a beautiful nun on a pilgrimage, and instantly falls in love with her. The monk goes to the convent and begs the nun to let him enter her service, claiming that he is a woman who has recently lost her husband and shaved her head. The nun accepts and greatly appreciates the diligent work he performs around the house. In their second year of living under one roof, they become close and start sharing a bed, although only as friends. In the first month of the following year, the new attendant-nun (*imamai no ama* 今参りの尼) is told to keep the house in order while his mistress secludes herself in the Buddha Hall for the seven-day chanting of the *nenbutsu* for the New Year. After the seven-day service is completed, the monk decides to initiate sex with the nun and thereby release his frustrated love. After his initial penetration of her, the nun jumps up and rushes into the Buddha Hall. Devastated, the monk crouches by the corner pillar and listens while the nun repeatedly rings the bell. Contrary to the monk's expectations, however, the nun returns with an unusually cheerful expression and she resumes their lovemaking. Afterwards, he asks why she had rejected him the first time. She replies, "Oh, I just could not keep such a wonderful pleasure to

myself, so I went to the Buddha and rang the bell to share my bliss with him!”<sup>25</sup>

This story ends with the narrator’s remark that the couple became husband and wife and lived a happy life together—much like the ending of *Chigo imamai*. Another common feature of the two stories is that the heroes in both were able to pass as women because of their hairstyles: in the one case, through the similarity in hairstyles of monks and nuns, and in the other, those of *chigo* and ladies-in-waiting. Furthermore, the narrator of each tale curiously refers to the protagonist as *imamai* (a new attendant). The most distinctive discrepancy between this short story and *Chigo imamai*, on the other hand, is the degree of effort invested in the “transformation.” While the monk in the *Kokon chomonjū* story simply passed as a nun without altering his appearance thanks to his naturally feminine face, the *chigo*’s makeover is more elaborate, and the narrator describes his exquisite charms in detail.

### 1.5. The Hero’s Fluid Sexuality and Dual Transvestism

While the hero of *Chigo imamai* is an idealized male protagonist in terms of elegance, abilities, and family lineage, he is also a character whose sexual orientation and gender shift widely. That is to say, he is engaged in a pederastic relationship with the abbot and later develops a heterosexual relationship with the young lady; and he performs dual transvestism by transforming from the already androgynized *chigo* to the stunning lady-in-waiting.

Whereas pederasty is a stigmatized form of sexual relationship today, it is important to maintain a historico-cultural perspective on medieval Japan when considering *chigo monogatari*. For instance, the Buddhologist Bernard Faure (1988) deems that the idealization of *chigo* in acolyte tales, which normalizes *chigo*-monk pederasty, “is not sufficient to redeem the massive child abuse” (278). Yet, the relationship between the *chigo* and the abbot depicted in *Chigo imamai* appears to be anything but abusive. This is especially significant given the presumed lay authorship of the piece, which indicates that the author was not obligated to idealize the *chigo*-monk love. For instance, when this tale’s hero falls lovesick, he is able to request a temporary leave from his duties at the temple and travel to Uji alone. During his time there, he does not plot an escape from Mount Hiei. Furthermore, the *chigo* never deplores his life as a *chigo* to either his wet nurse or to Himegimi, his closest confidantes. Rather, he expresses his gratitude towards the abbot when he first has an



appointment with the Minister of the Center (i.e. his future father-in-law). In sum, the *chigo* never seems to be forced to participate in the male-male sexual relationship he has with the abbot, and there is never any indication that his infatuation with Himegimi is a contradiction.

In addition to the *chigo*'s fluid sexuality, the spectrum of his socially perceived gender also ranges from "overly feminine" (in his guise as a beautiful lady-in-waiting), to "androgynous" (as a *chigo*), to "masculine" (as a nobleman and son-in-law of the powerful minister). Again, *Chigo imamairi* completely lacks any negative undertone towards the hero's transvestism in either the narration or the other characters' reactions to it. For instance, when the narrator praises the *chigo* after he transforms himself into a dazzling lady-in-waiting, his description is no less lavish than the way the beauty of Himegimi is depicted at the beginning of the story:

(description of the *chigo*)

After the wet nurse dressed the *chigo* in a silk *hakama*, he looked exactly like an elegant, exquisite lady-in-waiting. Delighted, she escorted him to the minister's mansion in a carriage. Inside the mansion, the lamps were beautifully lit, and the ladies-in-waiting came out to see the new girl [the *chigo*], who appeared to be in her late teens. Her refined, fresh youthful beauty was extremely appealing, and her hairstyle, eyebrows, and forehead, among other things, far surpassed their expectations.

(description of Himegimi)

The young lady seemed to be about fifteen or sixteen years of age. She leaned on an armrest, staring intently out at the blossoms. She was extraordinarily graceful, and her resplendent eyes and forehead were beyond description. When for some reason she flashed a smile, he felt as if his heart was filled with her loveliness, and her fragile shoulders were extremely beautiful as well.

Also, when the *chigo* reveals his identity to Himegimi for the first time, she is certainly stunned by the turn of events, but she never rejects the *chigo* for being "aberrant" or "perverted." Rather, she is moved by the magnitude of his admiration for her, and she eventually develops an intensely romantic relationship with this young man while he maintains his perfectly feminine guise.

Cases in which a male temporarily changes his appearance to that of a beautiful woman as a strategy to conceal his identity can also be observed in *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (The chronicles of Japan)<sup>26</sup> as well as *Heiji monogatari* 平治物語 (The tale of Heiji),<sup>27</sup> both of which are presented as historical events. Such favorable treatment of transvestism (the *chigo*, Prince Yamato Takeru, and Emperor Nijō) appears to be deeply

related to the aesthetics of noblemen in pre-modern Japan and challenges modern notions of gender distinction. Represented by pale skin, a youthful face, and fragile physique, ideal male beauty in pre-modern Japan may strike one as “feminine” when measured against 21st-century Western standards. Literary and historical figures well-known for their “feminine” beauty include Hikaru Genji, who his fellow playboys wish were a woman in the famous scene known as “Critique on a Rainy Night.”<sup>28</sup> Taira no Atsumori, whose youthful beauty enhanced by light makeup and blackened teeth almost makes the enemy Kumagai Naozane spare his life on the battlefield,<sup>29</sup> and Minamoto no Yoshitsune, whose appearance as a *chigo* has been equated with that of Yang Guifei as well as Consort Li of Emperor Wu, are two other examples.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, all of these three heroes are also counted among Japan’s traditional icons of male-male sexuality.<sup>31</sup> In each case, a beautiful man dressed as a woman possessed an enhanced attractiveness and beauty and, rather than being perceived as strange or comical, appealed to the readers of the time.

### 1.6. Positive Female Characters

One last attribute of *Chigo imamai* that is worth addressing is the favorable depiction of female characters. Compared to other *chigo monogatari*, in which women are either non-existent or reduced to a negative stereotypical role, such as the evil stepmothers in *Ashibiki* and *Hanamitsu*,<sup>32</sup> the women in this story are presented with noble, positive qualities. The heroine, Himegimi, for instance, is not a mere prize whom the hero “earns” as a result of some righteous deeds as do Issun bōshi and Lazy Tarō in their respective stories. After the disappearance of her lover, the pregnant Himegimi wanders in the mountains until her feet bleed. For a young lady who had “always been waited upon with an unprecedented kind of care and respect,” this is an extraordinary hardship. The story then begins to develop a sense of catharsis when Himegimi faces the nun goblin and asks for a night’s shelter. The next day, when the wicked goblins return to their dwelling, Himegimi remains strong and quietly observes the situation from inside the closet, while her lover is helpless and unconscious. Similar contrasts between a positively described female character and her less-than-positively depicted male counterpart are observed elsewhere in the story: (1) the hopelessly lovesick *chigo* and the wise, proactive wet nurse; (2) the gracious nun goblin and her malicious sons, who eventually kill their own mother; and (3) the nun goblin who gives up her life to save the pair and the abbot who attributes

the resolution to his holy powers. Such an unusually favorable depiction of female characters leads to the consideration that perhaps the author of *Chigo imamai* was a woman.

### 1.7. The Texts

My translation is based on two typeset texts. The first, included in *Muro-machi jidai monogatari taisei* 室町時代物語大成 (MJMT), volume 9, is based on a three-volume set Edo copy of *Narae-hon* 奈良絵本, books with bright colored illustrations called *Narae*.<sup>33</sup> Unlike the picture scroll version, the *Narae-hon* is entitled *Chigo ima*. The second is compiled in Ichiko Teiji's (1947) *Mikan chūsei shōsetsu* 未刊中世小説 (MCS), volume 1, probably based on the same or a very similar *Narae-hon* as MJMT's, although Ichiko does not mention the source.<sup>34</sup> In both texts, punctuation is added—a feature not found in pre-modern Japanese.

In the process of translation, I first parsed MJMT's version, and whenever a potential problem arose, mostly in punctuation, I compared both texts. I noted all the punctuation errors I was able to identify. For example, as explained in note 42, "*chi-no-hito yori, anjite*" in MJMT should be "*chi-no-hito yori-anjite*," as in MCS, without the comma. The phrase means "The wet nurse got together with others and they plotted something . . ." I also detected a few possible corruptions in the picture scroll's text (see notes 43 and 47).

Also, there are approximately two dozen poetic allusions as well as a few references to *The Tale of Genji* that I was able to identify in the text. All of these are annotated in the endnotes. For identifying the source poems, I found the on-line *Waka* Database, generously offered by the International Research Center for Japanese Studies, immensely helpful.<sup>35</sup>

### 1.8. Conclusion

Atypical within the genre of acolyte tales, *Chigo imamai* has thus far never attracted serious scholarly attention. Nevertheless, this tale provides us a new window into the medieval Japanese minds in regards to gender and sexuality, due to its distinctiveness. Unlike other better-known acolyte tales that are attributed to monks, my textual analyses indicate *Chigo imamai*'s lay and perhaps female authorship. If this is the case, the endorsement of man-boy relationships, secular or religious, would not have been the author's vested interest. Yet, the tale treats the relationship between the hero and his master as: (1) normal and amicable, and (2) something that has little to do with the *chigo*'s homosexual-

ity, which provides compelling evidence that monk-*chigo* love and non-categorical sexual orientation were accepted in medieval Japanese society. In addition, the dual transvestism of the *chigo* is used to enhance the hero's beauty, rather than as a device for mockery or criticism of gender fluidity.

## 2. A Translation of *Chigo Imamairi*

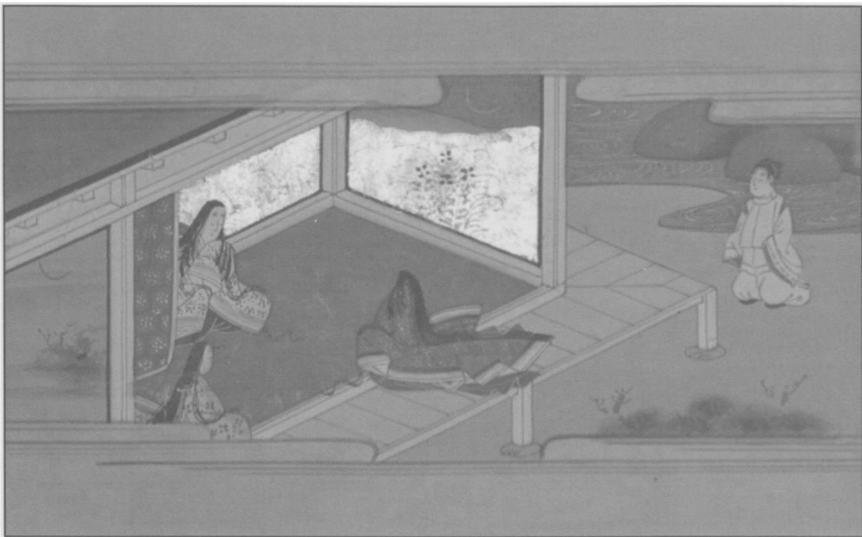
### *Chigo ima*, Volume One

Perhaps this is an event of recent years. There was a person who was holding simultaneously the positions of Minister of the Center and General of the Left. He did not have many children; rather, he had one son who had the title of lesser general and was unusually attractive. He also had a daughter whose beauty was utterly out of this world. Both the emperor and the crown prince wished to marry her. However, since the emperor's age was not suitable, her parents decided that she should marry the crown prince. So, the people at the minister's mansion waited on her with an unprecedented kind of care and respect. Not only was the lady's beauty superb, but she excelled in everything she learned as no one else ever had. Therefore, the minister was very protective of his daughter.

From the tenth of the second month or so, Himegimi started to feel terribly sick. At first, people thought the illness would last only a short while but, as days went by, she felt worse and worse. Although countless prayers were offered and skillful monks conducted rituals, there was no effect. It began to appear as though all means to save Himegimi had been exhausted, so her mother cried frantically. It just so happened, however, that the abbot of Mount Hiei had a great reputation as a man of holy powers. The minister thought that this abbot might be able to cure his daughter, and he sent his son to escort the abbot to the capital. The holy man descended from the mountain and conducted a purification ritual for Himegimi. Thanks to his prayers, she improved and was soon well enough to watch others playing musical instruments. Seeing this, the minister was overjoyed.

The seventh day of the third month had already passed, and the abbot was preparing to head back to the mountain. But the minister and his wife pleaded with him to stay longer, saying that the disease might not be completely cured and they were afraid of a relapse. Therefore, on the

seventeenth day of the month, he was still at the mansion. This abbot had a *chigo*, who always accompanied him everywhere, and he had come along with his master this time, as well. After the twentieth day of the month, the *chigo* strolled around the courtyard of the mansion, gazing at the cherry blossoms in full bloom and enjoying the quaint view of the pond. He came across a couple of women who were waiting on the minister's daughter. The young lady was leaning against the balustrade of the veranda, admiring the blossoms. Surprised, he hid under the flowery branches. Unaware of the presence of the *chigo*, the ladies-in-waiting said, "Let's raise this curtain higher and show our young mistress how the petals flutter in the twilight." Since they were about to raise the curtain, he became a little nervous, and hid in a more shadowy spot and watched with some trepidation.



The lady seemed to be about fifteen or sixteen years of age. She leaned on an armrest, intently staring out at the blossoms. She was extraordinarily graceful, and her resplendent eyes and forehead were beyond description. When for some reason she flashed a smile, he felt as if his heart was filled with her loveliness, and her fragile shoulders were extremely beautiful as well. Although the *chigo* was delighted to have seen all this, he still felt somewhat uneasy not knowing when he would be able to see her face again. The sun had set, and the ladies-in-waiting said, "We must

close the lattice shutters.” After everyone went back inside, it was painful for the *chigo* to leave the spot.

Now that Himegimi had completely recovered, the abbot returned to Mount Hiei. However, the *chigo*, having fallen ill, decided to recuperate at his wet nurse’s house in Uji for the time being.<sup>36</sup> The *chigo*, engrossed in deep thought, was oblivious of his surroundings, and remained listless. Mount Hiei constantly sent people to the wet nurse’s home in sympathy, and the doctor made much ado, saying this and that. Because nothing seemed to have an effect, the abbot was dismayed, and conducted a purification ritual, thinking it might be a case of spirit possession.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, the monks’ chanting mantras annoyed the *chigo*, and he thought to himself, “I wish I could just quietly focus on my thoughts.” He then left his bed and let the monks know that he was no longer ill and they were not needed. Even after this, however, he still felt disheartened for no particular reason. The *chigo* stayed up all night and remained in bed during the day. The wet nurse thought, “I doubt that he has any kind of illness. It must be that he is troubled by something,” and she picked up the sheets of paper on which he had scribbled when he was feeling slightly better. On one the *chigo* had written, “The only one I long for is she whom I vaguely saw in the mist,” over and over again, while another read, “I scribble words for pastime, and my brush is caught upon the words *I miss you*,”<sup>38</sup> and “Because I do not tell you how I feel, my heart is often unhinged like bristling reeds.”<sup>39</sup> The wet nurse thought, “As I suspected, he must be yearning for someone,” and she approached him and complained resentfully. She said, “Your feeling like this is not ordinary. I don’t know what kind of worries you may have, but no matter what they may be, you must let me assist you in some way. People say that it’s seriously sinful to die without sharing one’s concerns.” The *chigo* felt ashamed, thinking, “Just as I feared, my lovesickness has become so obvious that now people ask me about it,”<sup>40</sup> so he said, “Why would I have any worries?” For him, it was shameful that others knew of the tears that he himself was unaware of. Even though he didn’t know what to say, the destination of the smoke from his secret love was sinful.<sup>41</sup> At long last, he began to confide in her about how he had been feeling since he first fell in love on that flowery evening. As the *chigo* described how special the young lady was and how her delicacy made his heart completely restless, the wet nurse thought, “No wonder he was acting like that.”

The wet nurse got together with others and they plotted something.<sup>42</sup>

She took out an unusually gorgeous lacquer box, which was a tribute to the *chigo*'s master abbot from a son of a noble family who had taken holy vows under his guidance. Next, the wet nurse, accompanying a servant girl who was carrying the lacquer box, traveled to the minister's mansion.<sup>43</sup> At the quarters of the ladies-in-waiting, she had the girl ask, "Have you ordered a lacquer box?" whereupon the people called these two in. Because the lacquer box was beautiful like no others, a lady-in-waiting took it to her mistress's [the wife of the minister] chamber and showed it to her. The box indeed looked more tasteful than any of those created for Himegimi's upcoming wedding, and so the people believed someone must have ordered it, and treated the wet nurse and the girl servant with care and respect. In the meantime, when the wet nurse looked inside the chamber for the ladies-in-waiting, she saw a nice-looking girl. The wet nurse covered her face with her sleeve and started wailing frantically. People asked why. She answered, "It's so painful to even talk about this, but I just lost my only daughter. As I was mourning the loss, I also prayed to all the deities, saying, 'As a running stream will never return to the headwaters, she will not come back. I have accepted this, but please at least let me see someone who resembles her.' This young lady looks just like my daughter, and I cannot help longing for her. Nor can I stop crying, because she reminds me of my daughter's face in the mist of my tears." She wailed so hard that she could not finish her words, and everyone there was moved to tears. Then, a lady-in-waiting asked the wet nurse about the fee for the lacquer box, to which she responded, "Alas, I had a chance to see the lady who looks just like my beloved daughter all because of this lacquer box. So, I will just leave this here. If I can come to see that young lady every once in awhile, that would be more than enough." After the wet nurse heard which chamber the girl resided in, she left the box with the people there, and headed back home.

A few days later, the wet nurse came back to the mansion with some musk<sup>44</sup> and other kinds of incense for the young people there, which delighted them very much indeed, and soon the women all became close friends. Some ladies-in-waiting said, "We feel sorry for not paying for your lacquer box," and they gave the wet nurse many valuable things. While exchanging gifts, they became even closer, and the wet nurse became a frequent visitor at the mansion. One day, the wet nurse saw a number of ladies-in-waiting coming and going out of the quarters in haste. Therefore, she said to her friends, "I imagine how wonderful it would be, if I could see my own young mistress waiting upon the min-

ister's family." They replied, "Because of the upcoming wedding, our master is recruiting many people. I will talk to him." One of the ladies-in-waiting went to inquire of the minister about this matter. When she came back, she told the wet nurse that he would be interested in meeting the owner of the lacquer box. Thrilled, the wet nurse hurried home and said to the *chigo*, "Please find a way to get over your melancholy, dress yourself like a lady-in-waiting, and go to the minister's mansion." At first, the *chigo* was horrified by the wet nurse's outrageous idea. Nevertheless, he knew that acquiescence in this plot would let him live in the same premises as his beloved lady. Perhaps the clouds over Mount Takama might have been anticipating a change.<sup>45</sup> Because the wet nurse repeatedly encouraged him, his secret heart finally surrendered and gave in to his love for the lady.

After the wet nurse dressed the *chigo* in a silk *hakama*, he looked exactly like an elegant, exquisite lady-in-waiting. Delighted, she escorted him to the minister's mansion in a carriage. Inside the mansion, the lamps were beautifully lit, and the ladies-in-waiting came out to see the new girl, who appeared to be in her late teens. Her refined, fresh youthful beauty was extremely appealing, and her hairstyle, eyebrows, and forehead, among other things, far surpassed their expectations. When the young women stared at him closely and murmured, the wet nurse became very anxious. However, as usual, she eloquently dealt with the situation. When one lady-in-waiting asked what kind of skills he had, the *chigo* replied, "When my parents were still alive, I learned the *biwa*,<sup>46</sup> but after they were gone, I stopped playing." Just like this, the *chigo* was hired on that night. As he heard the sound of Himegimi's *koto* coming from her chamber,<sup>47</sup> his longing heart was placated so much more so than when he had been thinking of her from a distance. Nevertheless, the fear of being caught constantly haunted him.

|                          |                                  |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 琴の音に心ひかれて来しかとも浮きは離れぬ我涙かな |                                  |
| <i>koto no ne ni</i>     | Being enchanted                  |
| <i>kokoro hikarete</i>   | by the sound of your <i>koto</i> |
| <i>koshi kado mo</i>     | I am standing at the gate        |
| <i>uki wa hanarenu</i>   | where my sad tears float away    |
| <i>waga namida kana</i>  | and yet come back to me          |

On a brightly moonlit night, people were asking Himegimi to play the *koto*. Since the minister wished to let his daughter hear the new girl's *biwa*, the people brought the *chigo* over. Although his physique was



slender and a little childlike, his supreme charm and elegant beauty made Himegimi think, "No wonder everyone praises her." When she suggested the *chigo* should play the *biwa*, he refused saying, "I used to play a little bit, but due to my chronic illness, I have abandoned my *biwa*." Yet, because Himegimi insisted, he felt uneasy. When he finally played *Shūfū-raku*<sup>48</sup> in the *banshiki* mode,<sup>49</sup> however, the sounds that his plectrum produced and his hand motions were exceptionally refined. The minister was pleasantly surprised by the *chigo*'s performance, and, because he played even better than established *biwa* masters, the minister applauded him enthusiastically, saying he had never heard of such a thing.<sup>50</sup>

It was a little past the tenth day of the month, so the moon was clear, the insects were faintly chirping, and breezes were blowing over the bush clover, which let the *chigo* deeply appreciate the poem, "What color of autumn wind blows . . ." <sup>51</sup> This time of the year would even bring melancholia to the heart of one free of any worries, let alone someone like the *chigo*. He kept on thinking, if the wet nurse had been unaware of his secret infatuation for Himegimi, he would not have clung to his worthless dewdrop of a life. In the meantime, the sight of the screens separating the *chigo* and Himegimi in the empty room made him even more restless. However, for a moment, he was able to forget about his sorrow, perhaps because he felt the moon watching him, so he composed the following poem:

月のみや空に知るらん人知れぬ涙のひまのあるにつけても

|                          |                           |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>tsuki nomi ya</i>     | Up in the sky             |
| <i>sora ni shiruran</i>  | the moon is the only one  |
| <i>hito shirenu</i>      | who knows my sorrow       |
| <i>namida no hima no</i> | even when my secret tears |
| <i>aru ni tsukete mo</i> | stop flowing for a moment |

The people urged the *chigo* to play more music. As he played exotic songs unfamiliar to their ears, the night became more and more tranquil and exquisite, wherein people felt as if they were on the banks of the ancient Yangtze River.<sup>52</sup> Enthralled by the marvelous *biwa* music, Himegimi asked the *chigo* whether she could meet him. When the *chigo* pushed the screens aside and laid his eyes on Himegimi, those cherry blossoms lit in twilight were still nothing compared to her splendor.

### **Chigo ima, Volume Two**

From that evening on, the *chigo* personally attended Himegimi. Whether

he waited on her face-to-face in the daylight or he gazed at her from a distance, he was unable to calm his heart. As he searched for his way out, he might have entered the Forest of Sorrow.<sup>53</sup> His heart must have been extremely lonely. Meanwhile, the *chigo* pleased his new master by assiduously teaching his daughter the *biwa*. Although it was merely a playing of music—and fleeting at best—the minister found this new lady-in-waiting exceptional. While the *chigo* served Himegimi without leaving her sight at all, she gradually opened herself up to him, and they played music together endlessly. Nevertheless, he felt a wrench whenever this question appeared in his mind: “On what occasion should I reveal the secret love that burns in the kiln?”<sup>54</sup> The *chigo* then thought, “Although she completely trusts me, if the sign of my secretly smoldering love were ever to transpire, she would certainly turn her back on me.” Moreover, Himegimi’s wedding to the crown prince was approaching, and the *chigo*’s heart was in excruciating pain from his wish to forget about the magnificent lady.

One night, there were only a few ladies-in-waiting attending Himegimi, and the *chigo* found himself alone by her side. He tearfully confessed his longing for her: “Ever since that evening of cherry blossoms, the only place to smolder—other than Muro no Yashima—has been my heart.”<sup>55</sup> His confession continued until the branches of the silent pine tree growing on the rock drooped.<sup>56</sup> Now that the *chigo* had so greatly stunned and terrified Himegimi, what could he tell her next? Once the *chigo* had revealed his identity to her, he did not hesitate to repeat what was uppermost in his mind night after night. Although Himegimi initially found his keen courting unwelcome, after so many nights, she came to understand the depth of his affection. Now her worries turned to being caught with him, and she blushed constantly at the thought. As for the new lady-in-waiting [the *chigo*], he should now have been enjoying peace of mind, but instead he was terrified at the situation as well. Despite this, his love did not appear to fade one bit. Himegimi was frightened every time she and the *chigo* made love, but he never left her side and tended to her loyally. Now that her other attendants were busily occupied elsewhere on the premises, the couple spent day and night together in bed. Once when Himegimi’s mother walked in on one of the couple’s intimate moments, she expressed her happiness at how wonderful the *chigo*’s companionship was with her daughter. Rather comical, indeed.

Thus many days passed by, and Himegimi began to feel sick again.

Her father suspected spirit possession, and had monks conduct a purification ceremony. Because she was also missing that which should have come during the past two or three months, perhaps the new lady-in-waiting had an idea. When he told Himegimi what this might mean, she was devastated and sobbed endlessly.

In Uji, the abbot of Mount Hiei had been sending the wet nurse messages saying that had the *chigo*'s illness been cured, he should return. At first, she concocted reasons not to send the *chigo* back, but now the abbot started to complain. "There was a solemn ceremony with numerous guests on Mount Hiei, but the absence of our young master<sup>57</sup> was disappointing," an envoy said. Because the wet nurse was able to find no more room for fabricating another excuse, she visited the minister's mansion to give her master the news. Since the *chigo* was distressed about leaving Himegimi alone, he promised her that he would only be gone for four or five days, and explained, "They harshly blamed my wet nurse for my absence, and if I don't return soon, they will hold a grudge against us forever." Considering her changing body that she would soon be unable to hide, Himegimi did not know who could solace her troubled heart after the *chigo* left. She repeatedly asked herself, "If my heart asked, how should I answer?"<sup>58</sup> When the *chigo* prepared to leave, while Himegimi was crying uncontrollably, he felt as if his soul were entirely caught inside her tear-drenched sleeves. Despite the sorrow, he could no longer put off the farewell, so he told her he would leave at the break of dawn. Just then, the *chigo* sensed something was not right as a flock of birds gathered and soared over them.<sup>59</sup>

(the *chigo*)

かりそめのわかれとかつはおもへともこのあかつきやかきりなるらん

|                           |                            |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>karisome no</i>        | Although I think this is a |
| <i>wakare to katsu wa</i> | temporary parting          |
| <i>omoedomo</i>           | on the one hand,           |
| <i>kono akatsuki ya</i>   | will this be the last dawn |
| <i>kagiri naruran</i>     | we will spend together?    |

## (Himegimi)

かへりこんいのちしらねはかりそめのわかれとたにもわれは思はず

|                          |                               |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>kaerikon</i>          | Since I don't know            |
| <i>inochi shiraneba</i>  | if my life will last          |
| <i>karisome no</i>       | until the day you return      |
| <i>wakare to dani mo</i> | I don't think of this         |
| <i>ware wa omowazu</i>   | as merely a temporary parting |

While the *chigo* was unable to leave and was still hesitating, a child attendant came from the chamber and prodded him to hurry. There was no way to escape this situation, so even though he felt like the resentful widow crow,<sup>60</sup> his tearful soul began to prepare for the moment.

(The *chigo*)

きぬきぬのわかれはおなじなみたにてなをたか袖かぬれまさるらん

|                         |                                |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>kinuginu no</i>      | Though we share the same tears |
| <i>wakare wa onaji</i>  | while saying good-bye          |
| <i>namida nite</i>      | after our night together,      |
| <i>nao taga sode ga</i> | whose sleeve will soak up      |
| <i>nuremasaruran</i>    | more tears, yours or mine?     |

## (Himegimi)

たかそてのたくひもあらしなみた川うき名をなかすけさのわかれに

|                                        |                                        |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| <i>taga sode no</i>                    | My sleeve soaked tears                 |
| <i>tagui mo araji</i>                  | like no one else's                     |
| <i>namidagawa</i>                      | and turned into a river                |
| <i>ukina o nagasu</i>                  | at this morning parting                |
| <i>kesa no wakare ni</i> <sup>61</sup> | that will become the subject of gossip |

Distressed, the *chigo* changed back to his usual attire at the wet nurse's home, and ascended Mount Hiei on a palanquin. On the way, he painfully remembered Himegimi's face as she worried about becoming the subject of people's gossip. He thought that even a parting by death would have been better than this.

Back at Mount Hiei, the abbot and everyone else were overjoyed at the return of their *chigo*, and they held a sumptuous banquet to welcome him. The *chigo* was constantly picturing Himegimi, who was terrified about the secret that would be disclosed in no time. He wished at least that the seeds of forget-me-not flowers might let him forget his sadness,<sup>62</sup> but his mind was too preoccupied.

ゆめにそひうつゝにみゆるおもかけのせめてわするゝときのまもなし

|                            |                      |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>yume ni soi</i>         | Your face follows me |
| <i>utsutsu ni miyuru</i>   | in my dreams and     |
| <i>omokage no</i>          | in reality;          |
| <i>semete wasururu</i>     | I do not forget it   |
| <i>toki no ma mo nashi</i> | for even an instant  |

Thus four or five days passed, and the *chigo* was as usual whispering to himself as he was viewing the mountains, "In the evening that I became lost in clusters of clouds, you must have forgotten about me at once."<sup>63</sup> It was when he stepped forward to reach for a beautifully tinted falling maple leaf that some frightening *yamabushi*<sup>64</sup> emerged from nowhere. "Please come with us," they said, snatching the *chigo*, and soared up high into the sky, disappearing between the clouds. The monks called out, "On any occasion, it's ill-omened to stay out alone, so please come inside," but the *chigo* was nowhere to be found. The monks and the abbot in a panic made much ado, searching everywhere on Mount Hiei for the *chigo*. They concluded it must have been the work of goblins, which was such a disreputable matter for them. The marvelous work of Buddha was yet to be witnessed, and the newly constructed altar and serious prayers showed no effect. Meanwhile, days passed and rumors of the *chigo*'s disappearance spread to the capital, and people regarded it as a grave matter. The people at the minister's mansion also heard the news. Although they did not think much of it, Himegimi was certain that the missing *chigo* was her lover. How could she have felt indifferent?

しのはすはとはまし物を人しれすわかれのうちのまたわかれちを<sup>65</sup>

|                          |                                     |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>shinobazu wa</i>      | If our affair had not been a secret |
| <i>towamashi mono o</i>  | I would have asked                  |
| <i>hito shirezu</i>      | without anyone noticing             |
| <i>wakare no uchi no</i> | which way you have gone this time   |
| <i>mata wakareji o</i>   | after our farewell                  |

Now that the *chigo* was gone, she thought this parting was an infinite nightmare, and frantically lamented not knowing what to do.<sup>66</sup> Days passed, and her belly started to show, so she remained in bed lying down at all times. In despair, she wished to become the sediment at the bottom of the pond, but she feared becoming the subject of gossip even after her death. Whenever she imagined herself soon to be abandoned by the world like a buried tree,<sup>67</sup> all she could do was suffer from the pain,

caused by the only transgression she had committed, which she would never be able to escape. As for the crown prince, he was also alarmed by the illness of his fiancée, and her father was extremely disappointed to hear of his highness's wish to postpone the wedding.

The young lady had been looking for a chance to escape. One night, when her attendants nearby were in a deep sleep, she decided the time was right. She quietly sat up, and pushed the door open. Outside, the dawn moon was still partially visible, and this was the view of the sky that her distant lover must have yearned for. The freezing wind was ferociously blowing the clouds, obliterating the breaks between them through which the rumor could have evaporated.<sup>68</sup> The wind turned into an insensible noisy storm. Even if the weather outside had not been this way, it was a time of deepest sorrow for her. She probably thought her life would end soon, and it was natural that she could not have peace in her heart. Now that the birds were faintly chirping, she wished to entrust with the rooster a message of peace, for she was so heartbroken for her parents, who would deeply suffer from the loss of their child.

おしからぬみをはおもはすたらちねのおやのこゝろのやみそかなしき

|                          |                                 |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>oshikaranu</i>        | I am not clinging to            |
| <i>mi o ba omowazu</i>   | my unworthy life'               |
| <i>tarachine no</i>      | what saddens me is the darkness |
| <i>oya no kokoro no</i>  | my death will bring to          |
| <i>yami zo kanashiki</i> | the hearts of my parents        |

She sneaked out of the mansion with only a thin silk robe to lightly cover her face. Never having been in a situation like this, she did not even know which direction to go, nor did she know where she could find a river, so she just stood there, at a loss.<sup>69</sup> Just then a couple of woodcutters were walking towards the mountain. She discreetly headed in the same direction with them as her temporary guides. Because it was a steep slope, she was not sure how to get around, and there were no broken branch tips to indicate the way. Her feet turned crimson, covered with her own blood. She felt as if she were traveling in a dream. Now the mountain men headed off in a different direction; she had lost her last fleeting tie to this world. Without anyone to ask the way, she let her feet guide her on the dim, narrow road. Each of the thin, trailing clouds scattered into different directions on its own, and the sun had begun to rise, just like a scene on Mount Keirō.<sup>70</sup> She was afraid to be seen, so she decided to hide behind the base of a tree trunk. Blasts of wind violently

shook the oak tree and the leaves made eerie noises, for which she must have complained to the tree gods.<sup>71</sup> The only sign of people was the sound of axes some lowly folk were using to cut small branches. This sound further stirred her emotions.

なけきこる山ちのすゑはあとたえてこゝろくたくるおのゝをとかな<sup>72</sup>

|                         |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>nagekikoru</i>       | The mountain road        |
| <i>yamaji no sue wa</i> | of sorrow                |
| <i>ato taete</i>        | came to an end           |
| <i>kokoro kudakuru</i>  | as the sound of the axes |
| <i>ono no oto kana</i>  | broke my heart           |

She did not know where to end her life, so she climbed countless cloudy hills, wandering about the same mountain paths without knowing her destiny. Alas, she was hoping that some tree spirit would possess her and take her life away. She was hoping she might come upon some water to plunge into, but none was deep enough to serve her purpose.<sup>73</sup> After she had wandered about in the deep mountains all day long, it started to become darker everywhere, and the fierce gusts blowing against the bamboo grass were brutal. As someone who had disobeyed the world and entered the mountain roads like this, she wished for something to cleave a path through the darkness into the realm of the dead.<sup>74</sup>

The sun was now completely set. Although Himegimi no longer had any attachment to this world, it still horrified her. Then, there was a dim light towards the valley. If it had been summer, she would have assumed it was a firefly's light. Albeit feeling uneasy, she decided to head towards the light, for it could also be someone's dwelling.

みちのへのくさはのつゆときえもせてなにゝかゝれるいのちならん

|                           |                                 |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>michinobe no</i>       | If I am not to disappear        |
| <i>kusaba no tsuyu to</i> | like a dewdrop clinging         |
| <i>kie mo sede</i>        | to the grass by the wayside,    |
| <i>nani ni kakareru</i>   | what is it that my fragile life |
| <i>inochi naruran</i>     | is hanging onto now?            |

As the dews on the grass and the teardrops in Himegimi's eyes were about to evaporate, she came down to a dwelling only to find it a temporary brushwood hermitage. When she knocked on the door, a husky, frightening voice called, "Who is it?" Himegimi answered, "Please shelter me here for a while." Out came a goblin wearing a purple cap, standing as tall as the eaves, with a bird-like beak that was emitting flames.

She said to the young lady, “Who are you to wind up in a place like this? This is a place no human should come. Please leave now.” Yet, when Himegimi begged her to let her stay just for one night, explaining how dark and eerie it was outside, the nun told her to come in.

かせわたるしのゝをさゝのかりのよをいとふ山ちはおもはましかは<sup>75</sup>

|                          |                                          |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <i>kaze wataru</i>       | I should have thought of                 |
| <i>shino no ozasa no</i> | the mountain road                        |
| <i>kari no yo o</i>      | where I would abhor this ephemeral world |
| <i>itou yamaji wa</i>    | resembling the windy field of            |
| <i>omowamashikaba</i>    | bamboo grass                             |

Inside the hermitage, Himegimi saw rows of flesh on skewers stuck in the hearth. “I must have come to a house of ogres,” she thought in great horror. The nun goblin said, “I am one who has acquired mind-reading powers, so I already know what your thoughts are. The one whom you are thinking of will be here shortly. My children are formidable and lack any sense of elegance, so while they are here, you must not be seen.”<sup>76</sup> Please go inside this closet and watch us through the crack,” and she put Himegimi into a large closet.

Eventually the day dawned. And just as it did, rain suddenly began to pour, and stormy winds shook the treetops, making ghastly noises. Words cannot describe the terror Himegimi was experiencing. The only thing she managed to do was to pray to the gracious Kannon. She kept chanting the holy name of this bodhisattva while in a state of panic. Then, an evil-looking *yamabushi*, whose white hair could have been mistaken for snow, caught her eyes. He took a human out of his wings—it was none other than her beloved *chigo*. Mysteriously, her eyes were blinded by a flash. When she opened her eyes again, there were countless horrendous creatures of various forms, sitting around and drinking sake. Perhaps the *chigo* was in a trance, as he appeared to be oblivious to his own whereabouts. What the nun goblin said to her sons was, “That young human looks exhausted, so why not entrust me with caring for him? If you travel around with him, you might mistakenly hurt him.” The *yamabushi* replied, “Because the abbot is frantically praying for his return, be sure to keep him beside you at all times.” From inside the closet, Himegimi peeked at the goblins devouring slabs of some kind of flesh. Her blood froze at the sight.



### ***Chigo ima*, Volume Three**

The nun goblin managed to convince the *yamabushi* to leave the *chigo* with her. He said, "If you should lose this *chigo*, I will have no choice but to kill you, mother," and then all the goblins took off one by one. Once they were gone, the nun goblin let Himegimi out of the closet and showed the *chigo* to her. His mind was still nebulous, but, when the nun gave him some potion she had prepared, he regained consciousness. When the *chigo* at last saw his beloved, he was not certain whether he was dreaming or not. They were both speechless, and all they could do was cradle their faces in each other's sleeve and sob. He tried to lay the pieces of his memories together as if he had been out of his mind forever, and told Himegimi about the dreamy state of mind that he had just escaped. She also told him about her own story. Their sleeves were not large enough to soak up all the tears. The nun listened carefully to their stories and said, "I wish to change my appearance and enter the Buddha's Way. Therefore, I have been reciting the Lotus Sutra day and night. I shall give up my life so that you can return to the capital. If you learn that my children have taken my life, please have people conduct a service to pray for my salvation and have them chant the Victor's Dhāraṇī<sup>77</sup> and the Oleaster Mantra."<sup>78</sup> The *chigo* and the young lady were overjoyed. The nun asked the couple where she should take them, so the *chigo* said, "To my wet nurse's place in Uji." She held each of them under an arm and told them to close their eyes. She flew across the sky, and before long, the nun brought them to the house in Uji, dropped them on the veranda, and disappeared at lightning speed.

The wet nurse, ever since the disappearance of her young master, had found the prospect of remaining in the transient world ever so painful.<sup>79</sup> With no one now to hold her back, she shaved her head and wandered everywhere, letting her feet guide the way. Night and day, she prayed earnestly to Buddha, "Please do not obstruct my way to the Sixth Realm."<sup>80</sup> Also, please let me know my master's whereabouts just once and let me see him in this world. If he happens to have passed away already, then, may you take my worthless life away, and allow us to be reborn in the Pure Land together and exchange our vows." As this evening was no exception, she sat up in front of the statue of Buddha for her nightly routine and tearfully chanted, "May the spirit of the deceased attain enlightenment." It was then that she heard a knock on the side door. Had it been summer she would have assumed it was a marsh hen in the

wild, but since that was not the case, she decided it must have been just the wind making noise. Yet, the knocking sound continued, so then she thought, "How is it that I didn't hear the main gates being opened, and yet I am hearing someone standing outside my side door? How strange!" When she opened the door, standing there was none other than the *chigo* for whom she had been lamenting every minute of her life. For some reason, he was standing next to a beautiful lady-in-waiting whom she had never seen before, so she thought, "It must be a fox of some sort that has changed its appearance and come to see my reaction."<sup>81</sup> Regardless, she was so ecstatic to see the face of one for whom she had longed and dreamed about for so long, that she quickly invited the two inside. When the *chigo* gave the wet nurse a detailed account of the escapade, she was certain that this was truly the work of the buddhas and felt a tremendous amount of gratitude. Overwhelmed by the bliss of the moment, they could do naught but cry happy tears.

In the meantime, at the minister's mansion, people merely assumed their young mistress was sleeping late that day. When they at last realized that Himegimi was nowhere to be found, they naturally panicked and searched every inch of the premises for her. Still unable to find their young mistress, they knew they should no longer keep the matter a secret, and notified the minister of the awful news. He thought it was a bad dream, and searched for his daughter even in the most improbable places, only to find no trace of her. It was impossible for him to believe what was happening, and so he sat staring stuporously up at the sky. As for Himegimi's mother, all she could do was lie upon her bed as if she were dead. Needless to say, it was heartbreaking for anyone to see her this way. Nobody at the minister's mansion could maintain their composure. Diviners were summoned to augur the daughter's whereabouts, and each of them came to a different conclusion. There is not an easy way to describe the chaos in the mansion. If Himegimi's disappearance came to be known to the emperor and the crown prince, it would be a great disgrace, so the minister released a statement that his daughter's illness had become life-threatening. After that, envoys from many different places began to pour in. The emperor sent them a messenger, and the crown prince also frequently inquired after her condition, which, needless to say, mortified the minister. Terrified of becoming the subject of scandal, the minister, along with his wife, could not help but agonize about their future, not knowing whether they were in a nightmare or not. When he saw an open side-door, he wondered if perhaps his daughter had also been ab-

ducted at the hands of the goblins, just like that *chigo* from Mount Hiei. In order to appease their heartache, they started offering prayers to deities, and people were impressed by the sight of all the sacred horses the family offered to the many different shrines.<sup>82</sup>

When the minister secretly explained to the abbot of Mount Hiei exactly what had happened and begged him to pray for his daughter's safe return, the abbot thought, "I lost my *chigo* right from under my nose, so this must be the same case." He offered prayers, and the minister found this very reassuring.

Truly indeed, just as the nun goblin told the *chigo* and Himegimi, a murder of crows was seen swarming and soaring in the sky of Uji. The *chigo* looked over at what a crow had dropped onto the courtyard, and it turned out to be the feathery arm of the nun. He thought to himself, "The nun goblin did lose her life," and he was deeply saddened. It is said that the *chigo* dedicated a beautiful memorial service to the nun goblin, just as he had promised.

Now the time had come, and Himegimi's labor began. Because her suffering was great, the *chigo* and the wet nurse wondered what to do, and they offered the usual prayers to the buddhas. However, seeing that the prayers were not alleviating her condition, they secretly prepared doll surrogates.<sup>83</sup> After Himegimi bore the pain a bit more, a baby was born with a cry of the crane.<sup>84</sup> Jijū, the daughter of the wet nurse, picked the baby up, and announced a gorgeous baby boy. She was wonderfully content with the result of her complete devotion in delivering Himegimi's baby. The *chigo* wondered in whose time the seed had been sowed, and celebrated his future as a pine tree growing on a rock, with a wish for eight thousand years of prosperity.<sup>85</sup>

How shameful she must have felt! Himegimi wondered, "What if my father found out?" and remembered how impatiently he had been waiting for the wedding. Needless to say, seeing such an abbreviated birth ceremony with few attendants for her son, she felt deeply embarrassed, considering the promising life she had once been destined to have. As time went by, Himegimi repeatedly dreamt the same dream about her lamenting father, and it is agonizing enough just to imagine what must have been going through her mind. Understandably, Himegimi was in tears all the time, saying her good fortune would soon decline due to the sin of distressing her parents so greatly.

When the wet nurse told the abbot of Mount Hiei about the return of the *chigo*, he rushed down to see him. While the two cried, laughed, and

shared their old memories with each other, the abbot said to himself, "My holy power was not ineffective after all," and attributed the outcome to his own impressive strengths. The *chigo* explained to his master, "A young lady was also brought to the nun goblin's dwelling where I was staying, but because she wouldn't tell me who she was, I have no clue as to where to take her or what I need to do. I am very concerned." The abbot was so excited, knowing this must be the missing daughter of the minister, so he hurried back to the mansion and reported about this. At the moment the minister heard the news, his heart rushed and was filled with excitement. "Even though none of us has met this lady in person, since the story matches up, she may well be my daughter. Send some people over and show that lady to us," said the minister. As for the mother of Himegimi, her depression had been so great that she had not been able to see her surroundings. All she wanted was to become a nun. The minister requested leave from his official services to attend to his wife's taking of the tonsure, but the emperor refused. So, she spent days and nights in great distress. And then this happy news came in. She was ecstatic thinking that the lady might actually be her daughter, and she sent Saishō, Himegimi's former wet nurse, to see her.

Because the people from the minister's mansion could have recognized the *chigo* as the former lady-in-waiting had he remained in his *chigo* attire, he changed into an ordinary man's outfit and stayed behind the screens. When Saishō was finally reunited with her young mistress, she thought she was dreaming, although her tears knew that she was not, so she wept without saying a word. Himegimi was also speechless, and sobbed until her sleeves were soaked with her tears. This is when the *chigo* began to tell Saishō about the time the two spent at the nun goblin's hermitage. Then he went on, "Days passed by without my knowing who she was, and the two of us spent even more days together. Then my master the abbot contacted her father." Being a man of elegance, he went on to tell Saishō about his future plans in an exquisite manner, adding that his commitment to Himegimi would never change. Saishō, for her part, thought, "This was meant to happen," and promised that she would do anything to support their love, and prepared to hurry back to the capital.

As Saishō's carriage was being pulled back to the mansion,<sup>86</sup> Himegimi felt extremely anxious, wondering what would happen if Saishō said something that might complicate the situation. Thus everyone who remained behind was in greater turmoil than usual. Saishō rushed to the

mansion and reported the wonderful news to her master and mistress, sparing no detail. Needless to say, they were overjoyed, and Saishō asked what she needed to do next. She then described vividly how Himegimi ended up in the same place where the *chigo*, who had been abducted in Mount Hiei, was staying. The minister said, “My duty is to immediately send someone to escort my daughter back here,” and, after a while, Saishō and Chūnagon returned to the wet nurse’s home. Although Himegimi was glad to be returning home, she also felt uneasy and sad to leave Uji, where she had grown accustomed to living. Her heart ached knowing she had to leave behind the kindhearted, caring wet nurse. However, she remained silent hoping to slip from the house without notice.

Back at the mansion, her parents, who had been awaiting this moment forever, and Himegimi cried together as if going back to the time they had first separated, and of course, they could not speak any words. In Uji, on the other hand, the *chigo* was anxiously awaiting the escort from the capital. Despite Saishō and Chūnagon’s promise to immediately send people to Uji, he felt as though thousands of years had already passed. After twelve days or so, the escorting party came, all dressed magnificently, even including the oxherds. To attend upon Himegimi’s young son, the nephew of the minister, an officer of the imperial guard of the left, appeared in gorgeous attire. Other than him, there were three fifth-ranked aristocrats, five warriors, various servants, and so on. Even though the minister told them not to be overly pompous, more and more people expressed their wish to go along. Albeit their requests were refused, they were still delighted to be able witness such a brilliant procession, and they knew that even the wedding party that that certain famous minister of military affairs had sent for Naka no kimi would not have been as magnificent as this one.<sup>87</sup>

Back in Uji, the *chigo* came out dressed as a man. While he was watching a waterwheel spinning, he composed:

思ひきやうきにめぐりしみつくるまうれしきよにもあはん物かは<sup>88</sup>

|                          |                              |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>omoiki ya</i>         | O spinning waterwheel        |
| <i>uki ni megurishi</i>  | floating in this transience; |
| <i>mizukuruma</i>        | How could I have known       |
| <i>ureshiki yo ni mo</i> | that I would meet you        |
| <i>awan mono ka wa</i>   | in this gracious world?      |

The group of escorts arrived at the minister’s mansion, and in no time, the minister met the *chigo* and his grandson, along with the former lesser

general of the fourth-rank, now the head chamberlain and lieutenant general. Because the *chigo* was a man of superb heart, and his elegance was also outstanding, the people felt as if they were standing beside a blossoming cherry or beneath a maple in full color. The *chigo* told the parents his origin was none other than the descendants of the northern Fujiwara family, but after his parents had passed away, the wet nurse had raised him by herself, and then the abbot of Mount Hiei had become his guardian and had always stood by him like a shadow. Now that such a miraculous destiny from the couple's previous lives was revealed, the minister realized that such karma was rare indeed. Because Himegimi had been deemed dead by the emperor and the crown prince, he let the imperial court believe this lady was a daughter of his by his concubine. The gorgeous young couple moved into the minister's mansion, and their great reputation spread from court aristocrats to commoners.

Later in life, the couple was blessed with another dazzlingly beautiful son and also a daughter, who entered the court as the junior consort. The former lesser general was soon promoted to major general, which was an auspicious sign of his former life. Also, in memory of the nun goblin, the family copied the Great Five Mahayana Sutras, and built a stupa, in which they placed statues of Amida, Kannon, and Seishi bosatsu, and gave her a solemn service.<sup>89</sup> After this, the *chigo* had a dream of the nun goblin riding a purple cloud and being reborn in the Inner Sanctum of the Fourth Heavenly Realm.<sup>90</sup> The minister granted the *chigo*'s wet nurse a residence in the vicinity of his mansion, which was a wonderfully noble act. Furthermore, her daughter, Jijū, became a lady-in-waiting for the emperor's junior consort at a mansion on Third Avenue. Needless to say, everyone in the family flourished and led auspicious lives.

Those who see and hear this tale must be sure to keep it a secret.

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## NOTES

NKBZ = *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* 新編日本古典文学全集

SNKS = *Shinchō Nihon koten shūsei* 新潮日本古典集成

1. *Iwanami Bukkyō jiten* 岩波仏教辞典 (2nd ed., Iwanami Shoten, 2002; s.v. “chigo”). The etymology of the term is 乳子 (*chigo* “milk-child”). Although the term can simply denote “infants/children,” in the Buddhist context, *chigo* refers to androgynized pageboys, often written 稚児 (“young boy”) or simply as 児 (“boy”), indicating the male gender (嬰 is used for “girls”; *Dai kanwa jiten* 大漢和辞典, Taishūkan Shoten, 1955–1960). To read more about the lives of historical/nonfictional *chigo*, see Tsuchiya Megumi’s 土谷 恵 *Chusei jūin no shakai to geinō* 中世寺院の社会と芸能 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2001) and Matsuoka Shinpei’s 松岡心平 “Chigo to shite no Zeami” 稚児としての世阿弥 in his *Utage noshintai: Basara kara Zeami e* 宴の身体：バサラから世阿弥へ (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2004), 145–156. Also, a copy of a *kanbun* text that stipulates forty-nine rules imposed on *chigo*, *Uki* 右記, by Cloistered Prince Shukaku 守覚法親王 (1150–1202), can be found in *Shinkō gunsho ruijū* 新校群書類従, vol. 19 (Tokyo: Naigai Shoseki, 1928–1938, 1938–1940), 321–332.
2. Also known as *Chigo ima* as well as *Chigo imamai* no *sōshi*. Author unknown. *Terminus post quem* is early 14th century, because a poem included in *Shoku senzai wakashū* 続千載和歌集 (1320) is alluded to in the story.
3. For discussions of male-male love in pre-modern and early modern Japan, see, for example, Gary P. Leupp, *Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and Gregory M. Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse 1600–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). In Japanese, Iwata Jun’ichi’s 岩田準一 *Honchō nanshoku kō* 本朝男色考 (Toba City: Iwata Sadao, 1973), Shibayama Hajime’s 柴山肇 three-volume work *Edo nanshoku kō* 江戸男色考 (Tokyo: Hihyōsha, 1992–1993), and Tan’o Yasunori 丹尾安典, *Nanshoku no keshiki: Iwaneba koso are* 男色の景色：いはねばこそあれ (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2008), among others, are available.
4. Examples include *Goshūi wakashū* 後拾遺和歌集 (1086, no. 733) and *Shika wakashū* 詞花和歌集 (1127, nos. 259 and 260). Among private collections, see, for example, the “Love” volume of *Shoku mon’yō wakashū* 続門葉和歌集 (1305).
5. Kon Tōkō, “Chigo,” in *Kon Tōkō daihyōsaku senshū* 今東光代表作選集, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shinbunsha, 1973), 107–142. Kon, a former New Sensationalist School writer in the 1920s, took holy vows in 1930, and became the abbot of the Tendai temple Chūsonji in Hiraizumi. In the preface of “Chigo,” he states that the description of the ritual in this work is based on a copy of *Kō chigo shōgyō hiden*, a part of the Tendai School’s private library. This esoteric manual is listed in the second volume of *Shōwa gen-*

*zon Tendai shoseki sōgō mokuroku* 昭和現存天台書籍綜合目録 (Complete catalogue of texts of the Tendai School existing in the present Shōwa era) as “one volume; by Eshin 恵心 [Genshin 源信; 945–1017]; one-shaku six-sun in length; copied by Enkei 円憲 of Mount Haguro, Aizu, of Mutsu Province in Daiei 4 [1524]; owned by Tenkai 天海 of Mount Hiei” (109). Kon also denies that this manual was written by Eshin (108).

6. Kon, 124–126.
7. Ibid., 130.
8. *Chūsei ōchō monogatari, otogi zōshi jiten* 中世王朝物語・御伽草子事典 (Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 2002), 623–633.
9. Ichiko Teiji, *Chūsei chōsetsu no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppan-kai, 1955).
10. Ibid., 130–131.
11. Margaret H. Childs, “*Chigo monogatari*: Love Stories or Buddhist Sermons?” *Monumenta Nipponica* 35, no. 2 (1980): 127–151.
12. Hamanaka Osamu, in *Otogi zōshi jiten* お伽草子事典, ed. by Tokuda Kazuo (Tokyo, Tōkyōdō Shuppan, 2002; s. v. “*chigo mono*”), 81.
13. A fledging monk from Mount Hiei goes on a pilgrimage and sends his master a letter from the Mino prefecture. In the letter, the monk confesses to his master that he had fallen in love with a *chigo* at Hōrinji the previous year. However, the letter continues, when the *chigo* asked him the meaning of Izumi Shikibu’s famous *waka* poem that she allegedly composed for the holy man Shōkū, “*Kuraki yori/kuraki michi nizo/irinu beki/haruka ni terase/yama no ha no tsuki* (Out of the darkness into a dark path, I must enter: Shine on me from afar, Moon on the mountain’s rim!),” the monk was not able to answer. The *chigo* then said, “Your understanding of the Way of Buddha is not adequate. You have yet to earn the right to be intimate with me” and disappeared. The monk realized that the *chigo* was a manifestation of a deity and wept tears of bliss.
14. An aged monk of Hasedera in Yamato Province laments the lack of disciples who would pray for his salvation after his death. After praying to Hasedera Kannon for three years and three months, the old monk meets a beautiful runaway *chigo*, who was in need of a new master. However, their joyful life is disrupted by the *chigo*’s sudden illness. On his death bed, the *chigo* asks his master not to cremate his body but instead open the casket thirty-five days after his death. On the thirty-fifth day, during the solemn memorial service for the *chigo*, Bodhisattva Kannon appears and tells the monk that the *chigo* was one of his thirty-three avatars and promises the monk’s future salvation in the Western Paradise.
15. Hamanaka (2002), 81.
16. *Chigo monogatari sakuhin-gun no kijunteki na kessaku* 稚児物語作品群の基準的な傑作 (ibid., 81). “Autumn Night” also is the first *chigo monogatari*



that became available to English language readers, translated by Childs (1980). She also translated “The Tale of Genmu” (1991, 1996b) and “The Story of Kannon’s Manifestation as a *Chigo*” (1996a).

17. On the historical rivalry and conflict between the two temples, which in fact led to the destruction of Miidera by fire, see Mikael S. Adolphson, *The Gates of Power: Monks, Courtiers, and Warriors in Premodern Japan* (Honolulu, University of Hawai‘i Press, 2000), 138–141.
18. Paul S. Atkins, “*Chigo* in the Medieval Japanese Imagination,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 67, no. 3 (2008):952. The ten works he surveyed are *Aki no yo no nagamonogatari*, *Genmu monogatari*, *Ashibiki*, *Hanamitsu*, *Matsuho no ura monogatari* 松帆浦物語 (The tale of Matsuho Bay), *Toribeyama monogatari*, *Saga monogatari* 嵯峨物語 (The tale of Saga), *Ben no sōshi*, *Chigo Kannon engi*, and *Chigo imamai*.
19. Ibid., 964. Atkins draws an analogy between the *chigo* of three Buddhist acolyte tales (i.e., *Aki no yo no nagamonogatari*, *Ashibiki*, and *Genmu monogatari*), a legendary immortal boy known as Kiku jidō 菊慈童 (chrysanthemum boy) or Makura jidō 枕慈童 (pillow boy), and the Tang imperial consort Yang Guifei 楊貴妃.
20. In this tale, no characters have given names. Most are identified by their occupational titles and the like (e.g. “the *chigo*” and “the wet nurse”). Three of the women are addressed by nicknames that originate from court titles: Saishō 宰相, Chūnagon 中納言, and Jijū 侍従. As for the daughter of the minister, the author refers to her as *himegimi*, which is also a venerable and affectionate way to address a young noble lady, somewhat like a nickname. For this reason, I will refer to our heroine as “Himegimi.”
21. A man of humble birth becomes a salt vendor. Since his salt sells extremely well, he soon makes a fortune, and then becomes blessed with two beautiful daughters. In the end, the older sister marries a lieutenant general of the imperial guard, and the younger sister marries the emperor, after which their father serves the emperor as a major counselor, and lives a long happy life. Translated by James T. Araki, *Monumenta Nipponica* 38, no. 3 (1983):221–249.
22. A childless couple prays for a child and is conferred an extraordinarily small boy. The boy, named Issun bōshi (“one-inch monk”), seeks his fortune in the capital and vanquishes ogres on an island. Thanks to a miraculous mallet that the ogres have left behind, he becomes a tall man and marries the daughter of an aristocrat. Florence Sakade, trans., *Little One-Inch and Other Japanese Children’s Stories* (Rutland: Tuttle Publishing, 1958).
23. A young vagrant, Tarō, meets a stunning young lady and tenaciously begs her to marry him. When Tarō takes a bath and puts on formal attire, he turns out to be a handsome gentleman of superb wit and talent in poetry. In the end, his royal pedigree as a grandson of a former emperor is revealed, and

he marries the noble lady. Translated by Virginia Skord, *Monumenta Nipponica* 44, no. 2 (1989):186–198.

24. “*Torikaebaya monogatari* to kōdai bungaku: *Chigo ima* to no kankei” 「とりかへばや物語」と後代文学: 「ちごいま」との関係, *Heian bungaku kenkyū* 3 (1950):19–24. The plot summary of *The Changelings* is as follows: A supernumerary major counselor has one son (Wakagimi 若君) and one daughter (Himegimi) by different mothers. Due to a sin he committed in his previous life, he fell under the curse of a goblin. As a result, Wakagimi turns out unusually shy and timid, while Himegimi is extraordinarily outgoing. When people start to confuse their sexes, the father is too discomfited to correct the misunderstandings. Eventually, the curse is broken, and the siblings decide to switch their identities. Wakagimi becomes the Minister of the Left, and Himegimi becomes the principal consort of the emperor. Translated by Rosette F. Willig as *The Changelings: A Classical Japanese Court Tale* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983).
25. Tale no. 511. *SNKS*, vol. 76, 233–237.
26. “Just then, Prince Yamato Takeru let down his hair and dressed himself as a girl, and surreptitiously awaited the chance to sneak into Kawakami Takeru’s banquet . . . Having admired this girl’s appearance, Kawakami took her hand and told her to join him.” *SNKS*, vol. 2, 366–367.
27. “Although his [Emperor Nijō’s] royal face was by nature beautiful without any dark under-eye marks, now that he was dressed in a gorgeous robe, he appeared to be a dazzling lady-in-waiting. Hence they let [the emperor’s cart] out with no disturbance.” *SNKS*, vol. 41, 442.
28. *Amayo no shinasadame* 雨夜の品定 from the “Broom Tree” chapter, in which Genji and his friends gather and discuss the ideal type of women. In the midst of the intense discussion, the men stare at Genji, realizing no woman could be as appealing as he: “Over soft, layered white gowns he had on only a dress cloak, unlaced at the neck, and, lying there in the lamplight, against a pillar, he looked so beautiful that one could have wished him a woman.” Royall Tyler, trans., *The Tale of Genji* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 24.
29. *Heike monogatari* 平家物語, *NKBZ*, vol. 30, 248–249. Helen Craig McCullough’s translation, *The Tale of the Heike* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), is available.
30. *Gikeiki* 義経記, *SNKS*, vol. 62, 53. Helen Craig McCullough’s translation, *Yoshitsune: A Fifteenth Century Japanese Chronicle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), is available.
31. Pflugfelder (1999), 88.
32. A government official has a beautiful son, Hanamitsu. While stationed in the capital, he impregnates a woman, and Tsukimitsu is born. Back home, his wife raises both boys with much love and care, and they both become

*chigo*. After the death of his first wife, the man marries the mother of Tsukimitsu, who torments her stepson with coldness and makes him believe no one loves him. In despair, Hanamitsu elaborates a plan to kill himself: First, he hounds his two friends into agreeing to murder Tsukimitsu. Then, right before this plan is executed, Hanamitsu switches places with his brother, the prospective victim. This tragedy drives Tsukimitsu, the two friends, and the father towards the Way of Buddha.

33. Yokoyama Shigeru and Matsumoto Ryūshin, eds., *Muromachi jidai monogatari taisei*, vol. 9 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1981), 248–269. The commonly employed romanization *Nara(-)ehon* is inaccurate, because the word means “books illustrated with *Narae* (a painting style popular among artists employed by Nara temples),” rather than “picture books of Nara.” The alternative pronunciation, *Narae-bon*, is preferable, for it clearly indicates the morpheme boundary.
34. Ichiko Teiji, ed., *Mikan chūsei shōsetsu* 未刊中世小説, vol. 3, *Koten bunko* no. 12 (Tokyo: Koten Bunko), 64–101.
35. *Waka* database URL: [http://www.nichibun.ac.jp/graphicversion/dbase/waka\\_e.html](http://www.nichibun.ac.jp/graphicversion/dbase/waka_e.html) (accessed August 26, 2009).
36. The narrator refers to the *chigo*’s former wet nurse simply as *menoto* 乳母.
37. Based upon the context, the abbot remains on Mount Hiei, but has his disciples conduct the ritual.
38. This fragment (*kokoro-yukashiki tenarai wa koishi to nomi zo* 心ゆかしきてならひはこひしとのみそ) is a part of the poem *Awanu yo no/kokoro-yukashi no/tenerai wa/koishi to nomi zo/fude wa kakaruru* 逢はぬ夜の心行かしの手習ひは恋しとのみぞ筆はかかる (When I scribble words for pastime on the night I do not see you, my brush is caught upon the words *I miss you* over and over again); *Fuboku wakashō* 夫木和歌抄, no. 17125, by Tōren 登蓮. In this poem, *kokoro-yukashi* 心行かし is a noun that means “pastime,” but the text may have confused this word with its homophone, the *shiku*-adjective *kokoro-yukashi* 心懷し, which means “elegant; refined; modest; reserved.”
39. This fragment (*iwanu ni shigeki midare-ashi no ikanaru fushi ni* 言はぬにしげきみだれあしの、いかなるふしに) is a part of the poem *Kaku to dani/iwanu ni shigeki/midare-ashi no/ikanaru fushi ni/shirase somemashi* かくとだに言はぬに繁き乱れ葦のいかなる節に知らせそめまし (Thus I do not tell you how I feel, so my heart is often unhinged like thickly scattered reeds; In what occasion should I have begun to let you know?); *Shin chokusen wakashū* 新勅撰和歌集, no. 658, by Taikenmon’in Horikawa 待賢門堀河.
40. Allusion to *Shinoburedo/iro ni ideni keri/waga koi wa/mono ya omou to/hito no tou made* 忍ぶれど色に出でにけり我が恋はものや思ふと人の問ふまで (I yearn in secret but the truth of my passion must show in my face; so much so that someone asks if there’s something on my mind); *Shūi waka-*

*shū* 拾遺和歌集, no. 622, by Taira no Kanemori 平兼盛. Translated by Steven D. Carter, *Traditional Japanese Poetry: An Anthology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 218.

41. Allusion to *Shita-moe no/omoi no keburī/sue tsui ni/ukina nagara ya/sora ni tatsu namu* 下もえの思ひの煙すゑつみにうき名ながらや空に立なむ (I wish the end of the smoke from my secretively burning heart would finally reach the sky, as an undesirable rumor for us); *Shoku senzai wakashū* 続千載和歌集, no. 1108, by Fujiwara no Tamesada 藤原為定.
42. MJMT's punctuation, ちの人より、あんして, is incorrect. It should be ちの人(乳の人)、よりあんして(寄り案じて) instead (p. 251). MCS's text reads: ちの人よりあんじて (p. 68).
43. In both texts, this long sentence reads: ちの人…てばこのなべてならずうつくしかりけるを、このちごとにたびてけるを、めのとわらはにもたせつつ… (MCS p. 69; MJMT p. 251), but the repetition of the same subject within a single sentence seems rather awkward. Instead, this may be case of a mis-copying of *me-no-warawa* 女の童 (a girl servant).
44. *Jakō* 麝香.
45. Allusion to *Yoso ni nomi/mite ya yaminan/Kazuraki ya/Takama no yama no/mine no shirakumo* よそにのみ見てやゝみなんかつらきやたかまの山のみねの白雲 (In Kazuraki, am I to gaze you only at a distance, the white clouds crowning Mount Takama?); *Shinkokinshū* 新古今集, no. 990, unknown.
46. 琵琶, sometimes translated as “Japanese lute.”
47. Both versions use the Chinese character 事: つばねにて、ひめ君の御事(おこと)を、ききたてまつれば. This is probably a mistake for the homophone 御琴 (Himegimi's *koto*), because three lines earlier, the *chigo* uses the prefix 御 with regard to the *biwa*, which is a parallel structure. Also, immediately after listening to Himegimi's “*koto*,” the *chigo* composes a poem about “the sound of *koto* (the musical instrument)”.
48. 秋風楽; part of the repertoire of *gagaku* 雅楽 music.
49. 盤渉調; the sixth mode based upon the B natural of ancient *gagaku*, which is a mode for winter.
50. He is surprised to hear a young woman playing the *biwa* so skillfully because it is predominately a men's instrument, although Lady Akashi in *The Tale of Genji* was known to be a great *biwa* player.
51. Allusion to *Aki fuku wa/ikanaru iro no/kaze nareba/mi ni shimu bakari/aware naruran* 秋吹くはいかなる色の風なれば身にしむばかりあはれなるらん (What would be the color of autumn winds that is making my heart so plaintive, as if the winds were penetrating my body?); *Shika waka shū* 詞花和歌集, no. 109, Izumi Shikibu 和泉式部.
52. 潯陽江, the ancient name of the Yangtze River 揚子江.

53. 嘆きの杜; an *utamakura* located in the city of Kokubu 国分市, Kagoshima Prefecture.
54. Allusion to *Wasurezu yo/mata wasurezu yo/kawaraya no shitataku keburī/shita musebitsutsu* 忘れすよまた忘れすよ瓦屋の下焚くけふり下むせひつつ (I have not forgotten—I will say it again—I have not forgotten; like the smoke of a roof-tile kiln burnt from the bottom, my heart is smoldering as I sob in secret); *Goshūi wakashū* 後拾遺和歌集, no. 707, by Fujiwara no Sa-nekata 藤原実方.
55. 室の八島; an *utamakura* located in Shimotsuke Province.
56. Allusion to *Mono o koso/iwane no matsu mo/omourashi/chiyo furu sue mo/katabuki ni keri* ものをこそいはねの松もおもうらし千代ふる末もかたふきにけり (Even the silent pine planted on the rock must be pondering something; its thousand-year-old branches have drooped); *Komachishū* 小町集, no. 50.
57. Wakagimi 若君. The messenger from the mountain uses honorifics for the *chigo*: 此のわかぎみのおわせざらんは; *owasu* is a honorific verb that means “to be.” This illustrates how the *chigo* is revered at Enryakuji.
58. Allusion to *Naki na zo to/hito niwa iite/arinubeshi/kokoro no towaba/ikaga kotaen* なき名そと人にはいひて有りぬへし心のとははいかかこたへん (I can tell others it is an unsound rumor, but when my heart asks me how should I answer?); *Gosen wakashū* 後撰和歌集, no. 725, unknown.
59. Suggesting goblins are watching the *chigo*.
60. Allusion to *Nikukarishi/yamome karasu mo/ureshiki wa/tada hitori nuru/akatsuki no sora* 憎かりしやもめからすもうれしきはたた一人寝る暁の空 (What delights me is the restful lonesome sleep under the dawn sky, despite those widow crows I once loathed); *Fuboku waka shō* 夫木和歌抄, no. 12727, by Inpumon'in no Taifu 殷富門大夫.
61. Allusion to *Koise-gawa/ukina o nagasu/minakami wa/sode ni tamaranu/namida narikeri* 恋瀬川うき名をなかくす水上は袖にたまらぬ涙なりけり (O Love ford river, your headwaters that spread the rumor is made of all my tears dripped from my sleeves); *Shoku goshūi wakashū* 続後拾遺和歌集, no. 675, by Ōe no Masakuni no musume 大江政国女.
62. Allusion to *Ima wa tote/wasururu kusa no/tane o dani/hito no kokoro ni/makasezu mogana* 今はとて忘るゝ草のたねをたに人の心にまかせすもかな (I hope I would never let you sow the seeds of forget-me-not in your heart while you say that now is the time to forget about me); *Shin chokusen wakashū* 新勅撰和歌集, no. 879, and *Tales of Ise*, section 21, unknown.
63. Allusion to *Kari no naku/mine no murakumo/fuki mayoi/akikaze samushi/yūgure no sora* 雁のなく峰のむらくも吹きまよひ秋風寒し夕暮れのそら (Clusters of clouds are blown in all directions while they are crowning the peak where the wild geese are calling—the autumn gust is cold under the dusk sky); *Mini shū* 壬二集, no. 438, Fujiwara no Ietaka 藤原家隆.

64. 山伏; ascetics who practice austerities in the mountains in order to attain holy or magical powers.
65. Allusion to *Kanashisa ni/soete mono no/kanashisa wa/wakare no uchi no/wakare narikeri* かなしさにそへて物のかなしさはわかれのうちの別なりけり (Sorrow accompanied by sorrow is losing a loved one while still getting over the loss of another); *Senzai wakashū*, no. 561, by Shōben no Myōbu 小弁命婦.
66. Allusion to *Yogatari ni/hito ya tsutaen/taguinaku/uki mi o samenu/yume ni nashitemo* 世かたりに人や伝へんたくひなくうき身を醒めぬ夢になしても (People soon enough will be passing on our tale, though I let our dream sweep me on till I forget what misfortune now is mine); poem from Fuji-tsubo to Genji in the “Young Murasaki” chapter. Translated by Tyler (2001), 97.
67. Allusion to: *Nagekazu yo/ima wata onaji/Natorigawa/seze no mumoregi/kuchi hatenu tomo* 嘆かすよ今はた同じ名取川瀬々の埋木朽ち果てぬとも (I shall not grieve; even if I decay like a tree buried with my reputation at the bottom of the Natori river); *Shin kokin wakashū*, no. 1999, by Fujiwara no Yoshitsune 藤原良経.
68. Allusion to *Tanomu zoyo/hedatsuru naka wa/ukinagara/ukitemo sora ni/kumoma araba to* たのむそよ隔つるなかはうきなからうきても空に雲間あらはと (My estranged love affair is floating in the sky; I hope there are breaks between the clouds for the rumor to fade away); *Enbun hyakushu* 延文百首, no. 2672, by Nijō Tameaki 二条為明.
69. She is looking for a place to end her life.
70. Keirō no yama 鷄籠山; Ch. *Jilóng shān*.
71. MJMT has inaccurate punctuation: ものすさまじくは、もりのかみに. The translation is based on MCS: ものすさまじく、はもり(葉守)のかみに.
72. Allusion to *Nagekikoru/yamaji wa hito mo/shiranaku ni/waga kokoro nomi/tsune ni yuku ran* なけ木こる山路は人も知らなくに我か心のみ常に行く覧 (No one else knows the mountain roads of sorrow where the woodcutters cut down trees; my heart must be the only one who always visits there); *Shūi wakashū*, no. 970, by Fujiwara no Aritoki 藤原有時.
73. 山のみのあさぎちぎりのすへたにもなし. Allusion to *Musubi keru/asaki chigiri no/hodo miete/akade wakaruru/yamanoi no mizu* むすひける浅きちぎりのほと見えてあかてわかるる山の井の水 (Although the mountain well never ceases to spring, it is as shallow as your vow to me); *Sengohyaku-ban utaawase* 千五百番歌合, no. 2486, by Minamoto no Tomochika 源具親.
74. Allusion to *Nochi no yo no/tanomi ni nashite/koishi nan/ikite matsubeki/chigiri narazu wa* のちの世のたのみになして恋ひしなんいきて待つへき契ならずは (Because the vow I have exchanged with you is not worth my life in this world, I would cling to it in the realm of the dead); *Shin senzai wakashū*, no. 1219, by Fujiwara no Tameuji 藤原為氏.

75. Allusion to *Kaze soyogu/shino no ozasa no/kari no yo o/omou nezame ni/tsuyu zo koboruru* 風そよく篠の小笹の仮の世を思ふ寝覚めに露そこほるる (Upon the awakening of the whispering bamboo grass, I shed tears like the falling dewdrops, for the transience of this world); *Shin kokin wakashū*, no. 1563, by Cloistered Prince Shukaku 守覚法親王.
76. MJMT's punctuation is inaccurate: 物のあはれをしらぬものにてはんべる、ときにみえさせたまひては、あしかるべし. The translation is based on MCS: 物のあはれをしらぬものにて、はんべるときにみえさせたまひては、あしかるべし.
77. *Sonshō darani* 尊勝陀羅尼.
78. *Shuyu no ju* 茱萸の呪.
79. MJMT's punctuation is incorrect: うきよの中も、いとはしく見えぬ、山路… My translation is based on MCS's punctuation: うきよの中もいとはしく、見えぬ山路の….
80. 六るのみち; the sixth level of the afterlife world, or the heavenly realm (*ten-kai* 天界).
81. In the original, the wet nurse is referring to herself as *ama* (a nun).
82. *Jinme* 神馬 are horses that are dedicated to Shintō shrines.
83. しのひて御なて物やうの物はかりにて. *Nademono* 撫物 refers to dolls used for purification rituals and prayers.
84. たつの一こゑなきいて給へぬ.
85. Allusion to *Ta ga yo ni ka/tane wa makishi to/hito towaba/ikaga iwane no/matsu wa kotaen* 誰か世にかたねはまきしと人間はゝいかゝ岩根の松はこたへん (If one day they ask, in whose reign its seed was sown, how will it answer, the pine among the rooted rocks in this rugged land?). Edwin A. Cranston, trans., *A Waka Anthology*, vol. 2, *Grasses of Remembrance*, Part B (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 873. In the "Oak Tree" chapter of *The Tale of Genji*, Genji composes this poem for the Third Princess, who has just given birth to her illegitimate child.
86. MJMT's punctuation is incorrect: さいしやうのめのとかへり、まいりくるまひぎいるるほとも心なく… The translation is based on MCS: さいしやうのめのとかへりまいり、くるまひぎいるるほとも….
87. Prince Niou and the second daughter of the Eighth Prince from the *Tale of Genji*, in the "Trefoil Knots" chapter.
88. Allusion to *Hayaki se ni/tatanu bakari zo/mizuguruma/ware mo ukiyo ni/meguruto o shire* はやき瀬にたゝぬはかりそ水車われも憂き世にめくるとを知れ (Spinning waterwheel, know that I am also whirling in this fleeting world, though I am not standing in the torrent); *Kin'yō wakashū* 金葉和歌集, no. 561, Abbot Gyōson 僧正行尊.
89. 阿弥陀 Sk. Amitābha, 観音 Sk. Avalokiteśvara, and 勢至 Sk. Mahāsthāmaprāpta.

90. とそつのないゐん 兜率内院.

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## At Midlife in Medieval Japan

Richard K. PAYNE

*“A Long Tale for an Autumn Night” tells the story of an ill-fated love affair between Keikai, a highly placed priest of Mt. Hiei, and Lord Ume-waka, son of the Hanazono Minister of the Left. It ends with the burning of Mii-dera, where the young lord had been residing as a chigo, the suicide of the young lord, the awakening of Keikai to the truth of impermanence, and the revelation of the young lord as an incarnation of the bodhisattva Kannon. It has been interpreted as didactic, teaching the doctrine of impermanence, and also as part of a cynical attempt to obscure the realities of institutionalized homosexual prostitution and rape. An alternate interpretation from the perspective of analytic psychology sees it as a tale of midlife transition. This interpretation raises the issue of applying a psychological theory developed in the context of twentieth-century Euro-America to medieval Japan. Hermeneutic pluralism maintains that several different interpretations may all be informative and are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Alternate interpretive theories can be evaluated in terms of interpretive power and interpretive scope, while specific interpretations must be evaluated in terms of interpretive match. On all of these criteria, the interpretation of “A Long Tale” as one of midlife transition appears to be supported.*

**Keywords:** *chigo monogatari* — midlife transition — analytic psychology — Tale — Autumn Night — hermeneutic theory

IF IT IS TO AVOID THE pitfalls of an uncritical and decontextualized comparativism, use of analytic psychology in the academic study of religion necessarily entails questioning the propriety of applying analytic psychology cross-culturally. Are these concepts culturally delimited? Are they only applicable to Zürich in the first half of the twentieth century? To Western Europe? To the larger European cultural sphere, e.g., the U.S. and Canada? Or does analytic psychology provide a set of theories for interpreting a wide variety of religious phenomena?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One may wonder to what extent perhaps Jung's own interest in the dreams and symbol

Independent confirmation is one of the most important standards for evaluating scientific theories. Yet, independent confirmation is rarely expected in a field so suspect of being subject to the vagaries of an individual researcher's beliefs as is the psychological interpretation of religious phenomena. Is the example being molded by the researcher's own preconceptions so that it appears to conform with the conceptual scheme of analytic psychology? In the case of the medieval Japanese story "A Long Tale for an Autumn Night," however, the match between the plot and symbols of the story, and the pattern of developments occurring in midlife, as described by Murray STEIN (1983) and Joseph HENDERSON (1967, pp. 196-221) is so striking—despite the distance in time and culture—that it is hard to see it as only an artifact of interpretation.

"A Long Tale for an Autumn Night" (*Aki no yo no nagamonogatari* 秋夜長物語) has been translated by Margaret H. CHILDS, who maintains that it is part of a "didactic literature" that develops "the concept of transience as experienced by Buddhist priests in the same way as medieval war tales reveal its meaning for warriors.... [T]he priests who wrote them were creating a literature relevant to their own experience, stories that depict a religious response to the tragedies of life" (1980, p. 131). The tale itself dates from at least 1377 and, though there is no attribution of authorship, scholars of medieval Japanese literature assume that the author must have been a Buddhist priest (CHILDS 1980, p. 127, n. 5).

### *Historical and Religious Context*

There are five aspects in the story that are important for understanding this "Long Tale" from medieval Japan: the historical conflict between Mii-dera 三井寺 and Mt. Hiei 比叡山; the importance placed on having an independent ordination platform; the role of armed monks; the role of doctrinal concepts (e.g., impermanence and originary awakening) in medieval Buddhism; and the position of *chigo* 稚児, young boys or novices, in medieval Japanese monasteries.

The story revolves around a conflict between two temples: Mii-dera and Mt. Hiei (these are the commonly used names; the temples' proper names are Onjō-ji 園城寺 and Enryaku-ji 延暦寺, respectively). Mt. Hiei had been founded by the famous priest<sup>2</sup> Saichō 最澄 (767-822) in the

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systems of other cultures—Native American, African, Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese—was itself motivated by this question.

<sup>2</sup> The terms "monk" and "priest" are used interchangeably here and are not intended to carry the same distinctions the terms would have in discussing religious specialists in the Christian tradition.

Heian era (794–1185; the era many consider to be Japan's "high classical" period) as the training and ritual center for Tendai Buddhism in Japan, while Mii-dera was established by one of his most famous successors, Ennin 円仁 (794–864). According to George SANSOM, the conflict was fundamentally "an unseemly jealous rivalry, perhaps intensified by a conflict over the degree of emphasis to be placed upon the mystic side of Buddhism, which it was Ennin's purpose to introduce into the Tendai teaching and practice" (1958, pp. 221–22).<sup>3</sup>

Later, as both institutions gained independent power, political conflicts came into play. At one point the abbacy of Mt. Hiei became vacant, a position requiring governmental approval. Both temples put forward candidates to fill the vacancy. The government first appointed the Mii-dera candidate, but under extreme pressure from Mt. Hiei, switched its appointment to the other candidate. At this point Mii-dera broke with Mt. Hiei, which leads to one of the problems at play in our story. The right to ordain priests was conferred by the government, and it had only been with great efforts that Mt. Hiei had itself gained the privilege of ordaining priests, breaking the long-standing monopoly on ordination held by Todai-ji 東大寺 in Nara. While previously Mii-dera monks had been ordained on Mt. Hiei, the schism between the two institutions now made this impossible. When Mii-dera applied to the government for the right to establish its own ordination platform, Mt. Hiei again exerted extreme pressure to block the granting of this right.

The means for applying this pressure was provided by groups of armed monks. With the initial tensions between these two temples, they each began to employ guards (*akusō* 悪僧, literally "bad monks"). With the growth of holdings of landed estates (*shōen* 莊園), monasteries needed larger bodies of warriors to protect their properties and collect their taxes. Groups of armed monks (*sōhei* 僧兵) were established, effectively constituting standing armies—in many cases several thousand strong. Thus when Mt. Hiei wished to object to the appointment of the Mii-dera candidate to the abbacy, three thousand armed monks were dispatched to the residence of the regent, where they maintained an unbroken, noisy riot (SANSOM 1958, p. 271). Government forces were unable to control the monks and in this way Mt. Hiei forced the change.

Tensions between the two temples finally led to open warfare in May 1081. Mii-dera monks mistreated an imperial messenger on his

<sup>3</sup> The issue of how much tantric practice (Sansom's "mystic side of Buddhism") was to be integrated into Tendai would have been a major concern, on a par perhaps with whether there is Biblical authority for the sale of indulgences.

way to a shrine under the protection of Mt. Hiei. Thousands of monks from Mt. Hiei then descended on Mii-dera, burning all of the buildings and over twenty-thousand rolls of Buddhist texts. What was saved from the destruction was taken as spoils by the Mt. Hiei monks (SANSOM 1958, p. 271).<sup>4</sup>

Although the tale's description of the burning of Mii-dera is based upon historical events, it may also be seen as an expression of one of the most consistent themes of medieval Japanese literature: impermanence (Jpn. *mujō* 無常; Skt. *anitya*). According to William R. LAFLEUR, "By the end of the Heian period... a particular emphasis on the *mujō* of dwellings and habitations becomes manifest in the literature. This suggests that, from this point on, *mujō* was conceived of not only as *impermanence*—that is, as a temporal category—but also as *instability*, a spatial one" (1983, p. 61). Later, in a discussion of Kamo no Chōmei's 鴨長明 (1155–1216) *Hōjō-ki* 方丈記 ("Account of My Hut"), LaFleur points out that in medieval Japanese literature "The habitation becomes not merely another instance among many where *mujō* is demonstrated but a context of particular importance, a precise mediator between the large context, the world as a whole, and the small one, the individual. All are shot through and through with *mujō*; it pervades all" (LAFLEUR 1983, p. 63; see also LAFLEUR 1992, pp. 40–42).

Introduced to Japan as a basic tenet of Buddhism, impermanence became an important aesthetic category in medieval Japan. Sensitivity to the impermanence of things and the inevitable death of people leads to an aestheticized sadness, an awareness referred to as *mono no aware* 物の哀れ. For the poets of the Heian "spring blossoms and the autumn moon arouse only melancholy reflections upon *mono no aware*" (SANSOM 1958, p. 226). Diarists of the period, whether sincere or not, likewise express a world-weariness: "They must, they tell us, give up the vain search for pleasure and retire to a monastery or to some mountain retreat where they can lead a holy life and attend to their own salvation" (SANSOM 1958, p. 226).

Perhaps one of the most extreme examples of this aestheticization of impermanence is the transformation of a classic Indian Buddhist practice of meditating on decaying corpses.<sup>5</sup> In its Indian forms this

<sup>4</sup> The destruction of Mii-dera by monks from Mt. Hiei was repeated several times in the course of the medieval period. For example, another conflict in 1319 again led to the destruction of Mii-dera by the monks of Mt. Hiei (SANSOM 1958, p. 133). There were other similar conflicts as well, including a conflict over appointment to the abbacy of Kiyomizudera 清水寺 that led to the destruction of Kiyomizudera by monks from Mt. Hiei in 1113 (SANSOM 1958, p. 272). Many additional instances could be cited.

<sup>5</sup> There are two prominent versions of this meditation, one in nine stages found in the *Satipatthana-sutta*, and one in ten stages found in the *Visuddhimagga* (SANFORD 1988, p. 57).

practice was intended to free the meditator from any attachment to the body, an important aspect of the quest for liberation. In the medieval Japanese illustrated cycle of poems the *Kuzō-shi* 九想詩,<sup>6</sup> the decaying corpse is not only æstheticized but also eroticized, and is more than just a means for achieving liberation from attachment.<sup>7</sup> According to James SANFORD, the poems

show a considerable interest in the employment of the erotic possibilities of the topic, though this is in part a subtle effect carried more by the concretely organic images of the decay motif than by explicit sexual imagery. Still, “perfumed body,” “naked bodies,” the classical “clouds and rain” allusion, and even the painful image of flies like “a shining carpet on the flesh” are phrases that betray a less than philosophic turn of mind. (1988, p. 59)

While impermanence plays a central role in Buddhist teachings as a rationale for practice, it moved out of an exclusively religious role and came to be a consistent theme in poetry, novels, and diaries of the period. For medieval Japanese, then, the Buddhist concept of impermanence not only was important as a religious concept, but also permeated the culture.

One of the main characters in “A Long Tale for an Autumn Night” is Lord Umewaka 梅若, a boy living at Mii-dera as a *chigo*. Margaret H. Childs introduces her translation of “A Long Tale” with a brief definition of *chigo*:

In medieval Japan, the term *chigo* referred to boys between the ages of about seven and fourteen who resided in temples as though at a boarding school. A second meaning of *chigo* was youths involved in homosexual relationships with priests. It seems that the Buddhist priests who taught these boys in secluded mountain temples were relatively safe from the temptations of women, but were susceptible to the charms of the *chigo* who lived in their midst. (CHILDS 1980, p. 127)

Medieval Japan did not share the “modern antipathy toward homo-

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See Liz WILSON (1996) for a feminist reading of these practices in which the focus of attention is decaying *female* corpses. Also, John STRONG (1992, pp. 76–85) has written on a related motif in the legend of Upagupta.

<sup>6</sup> Falsely attributed to the Chinese T’ang dynasty poet Su Tung-po (1036–1101) (SANFORD 1988, p. 59).

<sup>7</sup> This link between the erotic and the ascetic is in fact also found in the Indian Buddhist context, where it provides one form of what Liz WILSON calls a “therapeutic of salvation” (1996, p. 115).



sexuality" (CHILDS 1980, p. 131).<sup>8</sup> Although in the literature the relations between monks and *chigo* often end tragically, the stories are to demonstrate impermanence, and are not intended to show that homosexuality and pedophilia inevitably lead to tragedy. "The stories exploit the style of Heian-period love tales, but, with some action and drama, they develop the concept of transience [impermanence] as experienced by Buddhist priests in the same way as medieval war tales reveal its meaning for warriors... the priests who wrote them were creating a literature relevant to their own experience, stories that depict a religious response to the tragedies of life" (CHILDS 1980, p. 131).

Bernard FAURE has researched additional background on the religious practices surrounding *chigo*, particularly in some Tendai lineages (1998). Relevant to our understanding of "A Long Tale" is the practice of *chigo kanjō* 稚児灌頂, a form of ordination or empowerment (Skt. *abhiṣeka*) in which the *chigo* is ritually identified with the bodhisattva Kannon. Through ritual identification the *chigo* becomes a living embodiment, or *avatar*, of Kannon. Thus, it is not surprising that the *chigo* at the center of action in "A Long Tale" is revealed at the end to have been Kannon, who had become embodied for the benefit of the monk, and monastic and lay communities.

The practice of *chigo kanjō* is in turn linked to the doctrine of originary awakening (*hongaku* 本覚), one interpretation of which was the identity of defilements and awakening (*bonnō soku bodai* 煩惱即菩提). FAURE explains:

Following the *hongaku* notion that "defilements are awakening," sexual transgression with a *chigo* involves no culpability, provided that the *chigo* has duly received the *abhiṣeka*, that is, that he is Kannon... having sex with an avatar of Kannon transmutes desire into deliverance, whereas having sex with an uninitiated *chigo*, a profane body, will cause one to fall into the three evil destinies. Avatars of Kannon were relatively rare in China and pre-Kamakura Japan, however, whereas in medieval Tendai they were created ritually. The self-serving aspect of this reasoning is all too obvious. False consciousness or not, the fact remains that the identity between the *chigo* and Kannon or other bodhisattvas and *kamis* had become part of the medieval Japanese imaginary. (1998, p. 261)

Faure's research goes beyond the *chigo monogatari* 稚児物語, which casts the relations between monk and *chigo* in a "general atmosphere [that] is, to use categories that may be inappropriate, tragic and romantic"

<sup>8</sup> For an aestheticized version of homosexual relations in the Edo era, see SCHALOW 1990.

(FAURE 1998, p. 245). Examining the record for the actualities, Faure's analysis reveals the *chigo monogatari* to be "a rather crude ideological cover-up for a kind of institutionalized prostitution or rape" (FAURE 1998, p. 265). However, while "A Long Tale" can be interrogated as part of a duplicitous pretense of sanctity, it can also be approached as a psychological document revealing the way in which medieval Japanese monastics approached midlife. The issue of a plurality of interpretive strategies will be discussed in the conclusion.

As "A Long Tale for an Autumn Night" may not be readily familiar to many readers, a rather detailed summary of the story is given in the following section.

*Précis of "A Long Tale for an Autumn Night"*

The story opens in a conversational mode, an unnamed narrator speaking to a group of priests late in the evening. "Recently I have heard something very strange, enough, indeed, to make you raise your heads from your pillows. I shall tell you a long tale for an autumn night to keep you company in the sleeplessness of old age" (CHILDS 1980, p. 132). This tale of long ago concerns Master Keikai 景戒, a priest of the Eastern Pagoda on Mt. Hiei. Keikai is introduced as fully accomplished—"proficient in both religious practices and scholarship" (CHILDS 1980, p. 132), a teacher (*risshi* 律師) of the rules of the order (Jpn. *ritsu* 律; Skt. *vinaya*), learned in the Tendai tradition, familiar with the four methods of attaining enlightenment<sup>9</sup> and the three insights.<sup>10</sup> Also knowledgeable regarding Confucianism and military science, "he was a true master of both the literary and military arts" (CHILDS 1980, p. 133). He was relied upon by everyone, "clergy and laity alike" (CHILDS 1980, p. 133).

He is "in the prime of life"; however, one day he awakens "from a restless night of dreams of falling blossoms and scattering leaves" (CHILDS 1980, p. 133). He is dissatisfied with his own conduct. Despite having entered the path of the buddhas, "night and day I am preoccupied only with fame and profit" (CHILDS 1980, p. 133). He desires to leave his temple and build himself a retreat, "a hut of brushwood," deep in the mountains. However, his karmic relations, both with his fellow priests and with the deities of the temple, make it difficult for

<sup>9</sup> The four methods are "sudden, gradual, esoteric, and variable" (CHILDS 1980, p. 133, n. 28).

<sup>10</sup> The three insights are "that all things are immaterial or void, that all things are unreal or transient, and a middle ground, consideration of both concepts" (CHILDS 1980, p. 133, n. 28).

him to depart, and considerable time passes aimlessly, despite his fervent desire to become a recluse.

Perhaps “the reason that such a fervent wish had not been answered was that some evil spirit was obstructing him” (CHILDS 1980, p. 133). He travels to a temple in Ishiyama 石山 to enlist the aid of the bodhisattva Kannon (Skt. Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva symbolizing the perfection of compassion). “For seventeen days he would prostrate himself and with single-minded sincerity pray that his heart be made firm so that he might soon attain supreme enlightenment” (CHILDS 1980, p. 133).

The evening of the seventh night of his vigil finds him falling asleep with his head on the dais, and having a dream in which he sees a “beautiful youth of indescribably noble appearance” (CHILDS 1980, p. 134). The youth is wearing “a robe embroidered with a pattern of green leaves” (CHILDS 1980, p. 134) and is gathering up the petals falling from a blooming cherry tree. Keikai believes that this portent is the answer to his prayers.

Returning to Mt. Hiei, “Keikai waited for faith to arise at any moment *as though he expected something from outside himself*” (CHILDS 1980, p. 134; emphasis added). However, rather than deepening his resolve to leave the world, the youth who appeared in Keikai’s dream becomes an obsession—a source of feelings of frustration and futility, since the desired is only a dream image. Keikai considers the possibility that it is Hie Sannō 日吉山王, the deity of Mt. Hiei, who is himself obstructing Keikai, because Hie Sannō wants to keep him at Mt. Hiei as one of his priests. Keikai decides to return to the temple of Kannon at Ishiyama.

On his way a sudden spring shower leads Keikai to take shelter at Mii-dera, a temple that has had a long series of conflicts with Mt. Hiei. Seeing the “beautifully colored branches of an ancient tree” over a garden wall, he approaches the gate to the garden. Looking in he sees the youth of his dream—“the master saw the very face, the same expression that, ever since his dream, had so captivated him that he had not known where he was” (CHILDS 1980, p. 135). Completely distracted, Keikai spends the night on the verandah of the main hall.

In the morning he returns to the garden gate, where he meets the youth’s attendant, a young boy named Keiju. The attendant identifies the youth as Lord Umewaka, son of the Hanazono 花蘭 Minister of the Left. Although wishing to send the young lord a letter expressing his feelings, Keikai feels that this would be too forward and immediately returns to Mt. Hiei without completing his journey to Ishiyama.

Keikai then begins to find excuses to visit an old acquaintance who lives close by Mii-dera. After some time he meets with Keiju and

expresses his feelings. Convinced of Keikai's sincerity, Keiju agrees to help, suggesting that Keikai write a letter that he will deliver to Lord Umewaka.

The letter delivered, the young lord replies, expressing his distrust of Keikai's sincerity. Keikai receives this reply and is only further moved by his desire. Wishing to stay close by, he concludes that this "would have been too obvious," and he sets off for Mt. Hiei. Delaying at every step, he only reaches a village on the shore of Lake Biwa, at the foot of Mt. Hiei, where he takes shelter for the night. The next morning, wandering absent-mindedly back toward Mii-dera, he meets Keiju. Keiju is carrying a letter from the young lord, expressing a different attitude, now trusting in Keikai. Keiju arranges for Keikai to stay with an acquaintance of Keiju, a priest who lives close by the young lord's residence. At night Keikai goes to the residence and the young lord hopes to slip away so as to meet him secretly. But for ten days they cannot meet, and Keikai determines that he must return to his own temple. That very night, however, there comes an opportunity for them to finally meet.

Very late that night Keiju brings the young lord to Keikai's room. Keikai is overwhelmed by the young lord's beauty. "They wept as they opened their hearts to each other. Sincere were the vows they exchanged as they lay together" (CHILDS 1980, p. 139). Parting in the early morning, they exchange poems.

Dejectedly, Keikai returns to Mt. Hiei. Afraid to be seen in such a state, he declares that he is ill and refuses to see anyone, spending his days in despondency. Learning of the master's seclusion, the young lord grows concerned. Expecting a letter that never comes, he commands Keiju to take him to the master, no matter how far away or the consequences.

Despite not knowing where he is going, Keiju agrees to take the young lord to Keikai. Setting off, they make their way toward Mt. Hiei. Being unaccustomed to traveling by foot, however, the young lord becomes exhausted. Being pulled along by Keiju, the young lord wishes "that someone, even a goblin or ghost, would pick them up and take them to Mt. Hiei" (CHILDS 1980, p. 141).

As night falls, they take shelter under some pine trees. An aged *yamabushi* 山伏 (mountain ascetic) riding in a palanquin comes along and inquires concerning their destination. Declaring that he is going nearby the temple they seek, he offers to let them ride in his palanquin. Once inside, however, the young lord and Keiju find themselves flying through the air to a different mountain where they are "thrown into a cave which was shut up with a huge boulder. There was no

telling night from day; not a ray of moon or sun could they see. Water trickled from the moss, wind raged in the pines, and their cheeks were not dry for a moment. They discovered that many priests and lay people, men and women, had been captured and in the gloom they could hear no other sound than weeping" (CHILDS 1980, p. 141).

The disappearance of the young lord causes great distress among the priests of Mii-dera. Learning that a priest of Mt. Hiei, their ancient antagonist, "had recently pledged his love to the youth," (CHILDS 1980, p. 142) the priests of Mii-dera conclude that the young lord's father must have been complicitous. Five hundred of them attack the minister's residence and succeed in destroying everything, burning every building to the ground.

Sensing an opportunity to defeat Mt. Hiei, which had six times kept them from establishing an independent ordination platform, two thousand priests of Mii-dera set about fortifying their positions and setting up an ordination platform. Aware of this challenge, Mt. Hiei notifies over 3,700 branch temples and shrines. Amassing a force of over a hundred thousand, they launch an attack on Mii-dera. In the vanguard is Master Keikai. After three hours of fighting, the attackers are exhausted and the temple has still not been taken. Alone, Keikai drives forward, leaping into the ditch surrounding the defenses, then climbing the slope to storm over the fence. Alone among the three hundred defenders of this part of the temple, Keikai kills freely, scattering the defenders before him. His five hundred followers move in behind him, setting fire to the buildings of Mii-dera. All are "reduced to ashes in moments" (CHILDS 1980, p. 144). Only the shrine of Shinra Daimyōjin 新羅大明神, patron deity of Mii-dera, was left standing.

Meanwhile, locked in the goblin's cave, the young lord overhears the goblins gossiping about the destruction of Mii-dera. The goblins rejoice, glorying in the knowledge that it was their abduction of the young lord that has led to this most recent conflict between Mt. Hiei and Mii-dera. "The young lord was stunned, fearing lest he be to blame for the ravage of Mii-dera. With no one to tell him exactly how it happened, he and Keiju could only grieve and sob all the more" (CHILDS 1980, p. 145).

Just at that time the goblins bring an old man into the cavern. "His captor explained, 'I nabbed him when he missed a step and fell off the edge of a rain cloud. Give him some name and use him as a servant. He is inferior to no one at flying through the sky'" (CHILDS 1980, p. 145). After a couple of days the old man asks the young lord and Keiju why they are constantly crying. Upon learning of their situation, the old man expresses his wish to help them by taking them to the

capital. Collecting tears from the young lord's sleeves, he rolls them in his left hand. They form a large sphere that the old man breaks in half. Shaking the two halves, they become a flood inside the cavern. Suddenly, the old man changes into a storm god. Trembling in fear, the goblins flee and a dragon god kicks open the cavern prison. Placed upon a cloud, the young lord, Keiju, and all the other prisoners are transported to the capital.

Going to his father's mansion, the young lord and Keiju find it completely destroyed. Having nowhere else to turn, the two boys go back to Mii-dera, only to find it also destroyed. Desolate, the young lord feels that all of this destruction is his own fault, and his alone. After taking shelter for the night in the shrine of Shinra Daimyōjin, they go on to Ishiyama, hoping to find the chief priest of Mii-dera. Learning that he is not there, Keiju offers to go to Mt. Hiei to find Master Keikai. Feeling that the fault is all his own, the young lord decides to commit suicide. He writes a poem alluding to his intention, and without revealing the contents, has Keiju take it as a letter to Keikai.

Upon reading the letter, Keikai understands the meaning of the cryptic poem, and in a panic he and Keiju rush back toward Ishiyama. On their way, however, they meet a group of travelers who describe having seen a youth leap from the bridge over the Seta River 瀬田川 and disappear under the waters.

Hastening to the bridge, Keikai and Keiju find evidence that the youth who committed suicide was indeed the young lord. Although wishing to join him in death, Keikai and Keiju are restrained by a group of priests who arrive just then. After extensive searching, the young lord's body is finally found. No efforts at reviving him are successful. The following day the body is taken to a nearby crematory and "reduced to a wisp of smoke" (CHILDS 1980, p. 148).

After three days of mourning, Keikai sets out on a pilgrimage, carrying the young lord's ashes in a box strapped around his neck. Later he builds a hermitage on Mt. Nishi (or Sei-zan) 西山, where he prays continuously for the young lord's liberation. For his part, Keiju becomes a priest and retires into seclusion on Mt. Kōya 高野山.

Meanwhile, the thirty priests of Mii-dera who had originally attempted to establish their own ordination platform return to the temple. Determining that there is no way they can continue to live there, they decide to keep vigil in the shrine of Shinra Daimyōjin, offering a last formal service. "When it had grown so late that dream was indistinguishable from reality," a large company of high-ranking priests, courtiers, and their attendants arrive from "out of the vacant eastern

sky" (CHILDS 1980, p. 149). Upon inquiring of one of the retainers, the priests learn that Hie Sannō, the patron deity of Mt. Hiei, has come to visit Shinra Daimyōjin, the patron deity of Mii-dera. Shinra Daimyōjin emerges from his shrine and greets his guests. The feast and entertainment last all night.

In the morning, when they are leaving, Shinra Daimyōjin accompanies his guests beyond the temple gates, signifying his respect. As he returns to his shrine, one of the priests approaches him and inquires why he had entertained "Hie Sannō, the patron god of our enemy, Mt. Hiei. What is your divine motive?" (CHILDS 1980, p. 149).

Shinra Daimyōjin explains that the destruction of the temple opens up a field of merit for those who engage in its reconstruction. He is more concerned with facilitating awakening than with physical buildings. Both he and Hie Sannō are delighted with Keikai's awakening, which "was accomplished by the Ishiyama Kannon manifesting herself as a youth" (CHILDS 1980, p. 150). So saying, Shinra Daimyōjin withdraws into his shrine. When the thirty priests awaken, they all describe the same dream. The priests are inspired to practice austerities, and decide to visit Keikai in his hermitage. Keikai has now taken a new name, Sensai 瞻西.

For his part, Sensai's life as a recluse living in extremely austere circumstances draws many other visitors as well. Having experienced the truth of impermanence, he determines to establish a temple closer to the capital where he can provide others with religious teachings. "From near and far, treading close on each others' heels, the high and low flocked here to press their palms together in worship" (CHILDS 1980, p. 151).

### *Analysis: A Tale of Midlife Transition*

Both Murray Stein and Joseph Henderson have employed the tripartite analysis of rites of passage originating with Arnold van Gennep to describe the psychic transformations occurring at midlife: a separation from one's social group, a liminal period in which social identity is transformed, and a reincorporation into the social group with the new identity.<sup>11</sup> Stein also utilizes the developments of van Gennep's

<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, Hans DIECKMANN (1968) also employs a tripartite structure, but without making any explicit reference to van Gennep. The three phases are referred to in the subtitle of his work: crisis (Ger. *krise*), reversal (Ger. *umkehr*), and new beginning (Ger. *neubeginn*). The meaning of these three for Dieckmann may be glossed by reference to the titles of his three major chapters: the path inward (Ger. *der weg nach innen*), resignation (Ger. *die resignation*), and emergence (Ger. *der erfolg*).

ideas made by Victor Turner. Both Henderson and Stein feel a need to place greater emphasis on the psychological aspect of the transition they are describing, in contrast to the social aspects emphasized by van Gennep and Turner. This is evidenced by the modifications they make to the terminology employed. Stein speaks of separation, liminality, and reintegration—the last referring to a psychological reintegration following the disintegration of the sense of personal identity, the persona, experienced during the phases of separation and liminality (STEIN and STEIN 1987, p. 293). Van Gennep's term for the final stage is reincorporation, referring to the individual's reincorporation into a social group. HENDERSON speaks of submission, containment, and liberation (1967, p. 200). These refer to the individual's relation to a significant social group. For Henderson, however, there is a final stage of transition, or initiation into a final stage of life, which cannot properly be characterized by the symbolism of liberation. "The final stage of initiation, then, might best be called the state of *immanence* in the sense that individuation forces a man to obey the immanent law of his own nature in order to know himself as an individual" (HENDERSON 1967, p. 201). In the following we will examine the story from each of these two descriptions of the midlife transition.

*Stein: Characteristics of the Three Phases of the Midlife Transition*

Stein describes separation as a period of loss and death. One loses one's sense of purpose, one's involvement with the life one has lived: "The ability to prize your favorite objects—your 'works': children, possessions, power positions, accomplishments—has been stolen, and you are left wondering what happened last night? Where did it go?" (STEIN 1983, p. 4). The something that has died is the persona, the socially defined sense of identity. One is somehow no longer identified with the persona and it becomes a "corpse" that must be found and buried: "to identify the source of pain and then to put the past to rest by grieving, mourning, and burying it" (STEIN 1983, pp. 27–28). Our story opens with Keikai confronting just such a loss of certainty: "[One day] in the prime of life, he awakened from a restless night of dreams of falling blossoms and scattering leaves" (CHILDS 1980, p. 133). In Japanese literature falling blossoms and scattering leaves are classic symbols of impermanence. Keikai has become aware of impermanence, and is dissatisfied with what he has accomplished with his life to date. At the same time he is unable to follow up on his desire to make a change. He drifts along aimlessly, going through the round of temple life, which he now finds meaningless. Feeling himself blocked,



he wonders if there is some evil spirit who is obstructing him. However, it would seem that he cannot overcome the karmic bonds with the deities and priests of his temple through his own conscious, ego-based attitude. Therefore, he must seek intervention from some greater power, in this case the Ishiyama Kannon.<sup>12</sup> In Stein's terminology he has gone in search of the corpse so that it can be buried. Thus, Keikai has separated from his earlier psychosocial identity, his persona, and moved into liminality.

According to Stein the liminal phase is marked by three characteristic experiences—(1) confrontation with the shadow, (2) confrontation with the “soul-mate,” and (3) confrontation with death precipitating a steep descent into deep liminality, the descent into hell. The breakdown of the persona, the psychosocial identity, experienced in the separation phase releases “two hitherto repressed and otherwise unconscious elements of the personality: the rejected and inferior person one has always fought becoming (the *shadow*), and behind that the contrasexual ‘other,’ whose power one has always, for good reason, denied and evaded (the *animus* for a woman, the *anima* for a man)” (STEIN 1983, p. 26).

It would seem important when considering “A Long Tale” to see the entirety of the story as a dream—that is, every aspect refers to the midlife transition—instead of focusing solely on those events that occur only to Keikai. In his treatment of the Circe episode of the *Odyssey*, STEIN employs the same hermeneutic strategy:

If we regard the Circe episode as we would the *dream* of a man passing through midlife liminality, we may avoid the hazard of getting stuck at the level of a host of superficial parallels to conscious experience.... [Further,] this type of interpretation helps to steer clear of grossly moralistic observations and reflections, which inevitably end up obscuring the more subtle psychological meanings of events.

(1983, p. 89; emphasis in original)

From the perspective of seeing the entire tale as a dream, Mii-dera itself, with its long-standing antagonism against Mt. Hiei, may be seen as the realm of the shadow for Keikai. The attack upon the villa belonging to the father of the young lord represents an outbreak of

<sup>12</sup> As a figure representing an enlightened figure, it could be asserted that Ishiyama Kannon represents the *self* as this term is understood in analytic psychology, i.e., as the entirety of the psyche. This is not to be confused with the use of the term *self* in English as a gloss for *atman*, which carries metaphysical significance in Indian thought and the existence of which is, of course, denied in Buddhist thought (Skt. *anātman*).

the shadow. Stein sees uncontrollable impulses, e.g., kleptomania, alcoholism, promiscuity, as evidence of the shadow's activity. The monks who attack the villa are definitely out of control. They are acting on the paranoid suspicion that for some indiscernible reason, the young lord's father is conspiring to bring shame upon them. This paranoid suspicion would certainly seem to refer to an uncontrollable impulse, although in this case acted out collectively by a group of Mii-dera monks. The shadow, however, is only one of the two important repressed elements of the psyche. In many passages Stein identifies the other as the "soul-mate."

In Stein's interpretation of the *Odyssey*, the "soul-mate" is Circe, a "contrasexual 'other'." However, "A Long Tale" raises an important theoretical issue regarding the notion of "contrasexual 'other'" that Stein finds to be "more specific to the midlife transition" than to other life transitions (STEIN 1983, p. 107). Stein, as so many other theorists, seems to take heterosexual relationships as normative. The "soul-mate" is, therefore, structured according to the dominant pattern of the contrasexual opposite, the anima or animus. One would expect the dynamics of this aspect of the midlife transition to be open to greater variety in societies that are much more accepting of homosexual relationships, such as medieval Japan. Although the dynamics may be made more complex in such a social situation, the theory of midlife transition proposed by analytic psychology asserts that there is still a psychic need for the establishment of a new relation with the contrasexual other; for Keikai this would be the feminine anima. This complexity is played out in the relation between Kannon, understood in East Asia as female, and her incarnation as the young lord, the male object of homosexual desire.

The final liminal element described by Stein is the descent into hell that is associated with a confrontation with death. "At the crux of midlife liminality is the experience that is imaged, dreamt, and felt as existing in a land of the dead: the end of the line, a city of ghosts, rooms without exit, senseless chronicity and repetition, despair" (STEIN 1983, p. 108). Maintaining the hermeneutic strategy of seeing the entire story as relating to a midlife transition, there appear to be two corollaries of Odysseus's descent into hell: the kidnapping and imprisonment of the young lord and Keiju by the goblins and Keikai's period of austerities following the young lord's suicide.

The characteristics of subterranean darkness and despair are typical of the rapid descent into deep liminality described by Stein:

the young lord and Keiju were thrown into a cave which was shut up with a huge boulder. There was no telling night from

day; not a ray of moon or sun could they see. Water trickled from the moss, wind raged in the pines, and their cheeks were not dry for a moment. They discovered that many priests and laypeople, men and women, had been captured, and in the gloom they could hear no other sound than that of weeping.

(CHILDS 1980, p. 141)

In this cavern prison the young lord and Keiju are confronted with the threat of death and are in a state of deep liminality.

For Keikai the confrontation with death is the suicide of the young lord. Weeping over the body and performing the cremation appear as the pivotal events in leading Keikai to a full realization of impermanence. He then retreats into isolation on Mt. Nishi. Though lacking the explicit hellish qualities of the cavern prison, this retreat is another variant of extreme liminality—despite the tendency of Japanese culture to idealize and aestheticize the eremitic life. It is in this period that Keikai is transformed and completes his particular transition through the restructuring of his psychic orientation.

Following the *Odyssey*, Stein suggests that in deep liminality there is the opportunity to meet a “wise old man” (STEIN 1983, p. 92) from whom one gains guidance for the balance of one’s life, a new sense of mission and purpose (STEIN 1983, pp 122–26). Initially one might assume that the storm god who frees the prisoners from the cavern prison might be this wise old man, but he appears to be in some ways more of a trickster figure—first appearing as a helpless old man, then manifesting a power that overwhelms the goblins. Although not directly linked with the deep liminality of the imprisonment, the role of the wise old man is played much more clearly by Shinra Daimyōjin himself when he reveals the hidden purpose of the tragic events. “I am delighted by Keikai’s religious awakening and the good influence he has had on others. Although products of sorrow, these things are causes for joy” (CHILDS 1980, p. 150).

The final stage for Stein is reintegration, i.e., the creation of a new psychic organization. Keikai has finally learned the truth of impermanence and is able to fulfill the longing for solitary life that had initiated his separation from his persona. It is now, in this period of seclusion, practicing austerities, that Keikai succeeds in creating a new psychic organization. His actions up to this point have largely been ego-based, as, for example, the reemergence of the heroic attitude in the battle of Mii-dera. After the cremation his psyche is organized around the truth of impermanence. This new psychic organization is self-consciously marked by a new name—Keikai, Preceptor of the Eastern Pagoda of Mt. Hiei, has now become Sensai, eremitic recluse of Mt.

Nishi. A new purpose has taken hold of his life; initially performing ceaseless prayers for the benefit of the young lord, he eventually devotes himself to teaching others.

*Henderson: Interpersonal Dimension of the Midlife Transition*

Joseph Henderson has highlighted the importance of the social matrix for the movement toward individuation at midlife. "For individuation to become an actuality, three conditions are necessary... (1) separation from the original family or clan; (2) commitment to a meaningful group over a long period of time; and (3) liberation from too close an identity with the group" (HENDERSON 1967, p. 197).

Keikai's life evidences fulfillment of these three conditions. First, as a Buddhist priest, he has been removed from his natal family and received a new identity as a member of the Buddha's family. His high status on Mt. Hiei—Preceptor of the Rules of the Order—demonstrates his commitment over an extended period to his religious community. As the story relates, however, this commitment itself becomes part of what impedes him—his karmic relations, both with his fellow priests and with the deities of the temple, make it difficult for him to depart, and considerable time passes aimlessly, despite his fervent desire to become a recluse (CHILDS 1980, p. 133).

Finally, his romantic involvement with the young lord, who is under the protection of a temple long antagonistic to his own, fulfills the third condition. Keikai spends time with various priests in order to be close to the young lord. These are priests affiliated with Mii-dera, Mt. Hiei's despised other.

His identification with Mt. Hiei is still very strong, however, as evidenced by his leading role in the attack on Mii-dera. Henderson postulates "a cyclic character to each threshold crossing," which is evidenced by the fact that "people in the second half of life are frequently gripped by the youthful power of the hero myth, with which they are enabled to meet the next developmental challenge of their lives" (HENDERSON 1967, p. 196). Certainly Keikai's actions at the battle of Mii-dera are heroic—single-handedly breaching the defenses, opening the way to victory.

In an ironic twist it is this victory that leads to the suicide of Keikai's lover. Further, however, it is this very suicide that brings about Keikai's final separation from his identification with Mt. Hiei. Following the cremation, Keikai first undertakes a pilgrimage, which may be identified with what HENDERSON describes as "a journey of release, renunciation, and atonement, presided over and fostered by some spirit of

compassion" (1964, p. 152). Keikai then establishes a hermitage on Mt. Nishi. Here he is fully separated from his former identification with Mt. Hiei. As was common for medieval Japanese monks, he changes his name at this time, thus clearly marking his changed identity.

Henderson has pointed out that for individuation, the final stage is not simply liberation from some social group, but rather a consciousness of the immanent reality of one's individual existence. Not only is Keikai liberated from his former identification with his monastic role as a part of the community of Mt. Hiei, he has come to be an isolated individual. As an eremitic recluse, he is entirely alone:

In a thatched hut, eighteen feet square, half concealed by clouds, he wore a robe as thin as withered lotus leaves even after the frosts of late autumn and ate only fruit blown down by the morning breezes. The wind rustled through the pines, and streams babbled down the mountain slopes.

(CHILDS 1980, p. 150)

Despite his desire to live apart from the world, his fame for austerities grows, and he has an increasing number of visitors. As a result he determines to establish a temple closer to the capital from which he could be of greater service to others.

Although this aspect is not discussed by either Stein or Henderson, it has been proposed that one of the marks of a successful midlife transition is the development of an attitude of generativity, the desire to provide for others, especially for the next generation.<sup>13</sup> In Sensai's desire to establish a temple we see him moving beyond his individual existence as an isolated hermit and revealing his individual purpose, a leadership role. Such a position of leadership, founder of a new temple, is distinct from his youthful climb to authority and power. Where the earlier was persona-motivated, this new role is motivated by a desire for service, for generativity.

### *Individual Problematics of Keikai's Story*

Having established that the story follows the basic structure and con-

<sup>13</sup> Allan B. CHINEN describes generativity as "a nurturing attitude directed first toward one's children, and then toward the whole next generation—toward one's students, protégés, and junior colleagues" (1992, p. 30). Chinen cites Erik Erikson as having identified the importance of generativity for midlife development, though the concept (if not the specific term) is also found in the work of Hans DIECKMANN, who says of midlife that the task of midlife is to lead to a "different attitude toward the positions of leadership and the responsibilities already attained, an attitude that should reach beyond the events of the day, mindful of coming generations rather than solely concerned with fulfilling one's own drives, be they money, power, respect and recognition, or the like" (1991, p. 107).

tents of the midlife transition as described by Stein and Henderson, we can examine the unique characteristics of this story as a record of an individual's midlife transition. The drama of the story hinges entirely on "the lure of the soul-mate" often felt strongly at midlife. Stein describes the dangers involved: "During midlife liminality, the seductiveness of the anima can be especially dangerous, her song fatefully attractive, and her promises unspeakably alluring; and it is important to resist falling naively into the hands of the Power" (STEIN 1983, p. 101). Cornelia Brunner points to the characteristics of establishing a proper relation with the anima, stating that more than a relation with a person, it is "mainly the establishment of a relationship with the inner, feminine side of his psyche, and thus to the feminine principle. The deep fascination produced by the Anima-projection resides in its religious origin. The religious images at its base are suited to compensate for the one-sidedness of the masculine world-view" (BRUNNER 1986, p. 130). Lacking a proper relationship to the feminine, Keikai falls victim to the lure of the "soul-mate," Kannon embodied as the young lord.

As a monastic, Keikai would have had very little opportunity to establish a psychic relation with the feminine through an actual relationship with some particular woman,<sup>14</sup> and it is noteworthy that there are no women mentioned as such in the entire story. Because Kannon is generally considered to be feminine in East Asia, Keikai's appeal to her for assistance may be seen as an attempt to establish such a relation with the feminine as compassionate. However, unlike Odysseus, who receives assistance from Hermes when he establishes a relation with Circe, Kannon seems to purposely involve Keikai in a situation that calls forth his heroic attitude. Keikai's leadership in the battle of Mii-dera is an outward expression of the heroic attitude and is not inappropriate at midlife, where, as Henderson indicates, the reemergence of a youthful heroism is useful when employed for the more inward struggles of personal development.<sup>15</sup>

There is, then, more than simple irony in the fact that Keikai's success as the hero of the battle directly contributes to the suicide of the young lord. It is just that suicide that leads him to the realization of impermanence and retreat into solitude. Thus Kannon has indeed granted Keikai's original request for assistance.

<sup>14</sup> The case of Ikkyū, who did establish such a psychic relation with the feminine through an actual relationship with a woman, is noteworthy. See SANFORD 1981, COVELL 1980, and FAURE 1998.

<sup>15</sup> HENDERSON asserts that the initiatory imagery of midlife is distinctly different from that of earlier, heroic phases of life (1967, p. 198).

### Conclusion

Clearly, a story such as “A Long Tale” may be interpreted from a number of different perspectives.<sup>16</sup> It may be considered as a piece of literature, as indicated by both Childs’s and Faure’s discussions of the character of *chigo monogatari* as a genre and the place of “A Long Tale” in that genre (CHILDS 1980 and 1985; FAURE 1998, pp. 241–47). It may be seen as an instance of the religious culture of medieval Japan, employing such formal doctrines and popular conceptions as impermanence, originary awakening, identity of defilements and awakening, the incarnation of bodhisattvas, and the intercessionary character of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and kami. It may be approached sociohistorically, as Faure does when he questions the role of *chigo monogatari* as part of a “crude ideological cover-up” of institutionalized rape and prostitution. And, it may be understood psychologically, as an instance of a psychological genre of midlife tales (CHINEN 1992, pp. 1–7).

To date most of the research on midlife transition has been on tales and case materials from Western European societies. It raises the question then of whether the theory of a midlife transition can be applied to other times and cultures. Despite the difference in time and culture, Stein’s and Henderson’s descriptions of the midlife transition are startlingly accurate for understanding this medieval Japanese story. Both the tripartite sequence (separation, liminality, and reintegration, or submission, containment, and liberation) and the symbolic contents (loss of certainty, confrontation with the shadow, confrontation with the “soul-mate,” confrontation with death precipitating a steep decline into deep liminality, and reintegration of a new personal sense of life’s purpose) have significant similarities to the narrative of “A Long Tale.”

Each of the interpretive approaches mentioned above, together with others that may be developed, contribute to a larger understanding of the story. From the perspective of what I think of as “hermeneutic pluralism,” it is not a question of which interpretative approach is

<sup>16</sup> While my discussion here is in terms of interpretation, I do not accept the epistemic distinction between understanding and explanation, which in its current form derives most importantly from Vico and Dilthey. Although this dichotomy informs much of the methodology of the social sciences, amongst which I include religious studies, I think that if one can explain, then one understands, and that if one understands, then one can explain. By this I do not mean, however, a retreat to “the sterility of purely formal argument and debate” arising from a positivist approach to the social sciences (RABINOW and SULLIVAN 1987, p. 5), but rather more adequate formulation of both understanding and explanation. As Edward O. WILSON suggests (1998, p. 209), the distinction between understanding and explanation looks suspiciously like a matter of professional territoriality. Perhaps fortunately for the reader, a footnote is hardly the place to attempt a complete epistemology.

the correct one. It is, rather, a more pragmatic concern with what may be called interpretive power and interpretive scope. Interpretive power refers to the question of how much additional understanding the approach gains for us, or what it allows us to see that we would not have seen otherwise.<sup>17</sup> Interpretive scope refers to the question of how wide a range of material can be meaningfully compared and found to have significant similarities.

The analytic psychological theory of midlife transition does well on both of these criteria. Viewing “A Long Tale” as a midlife tale reveals aspects that may otherwise be overlooked, e.g., the significance of the irrational attack on the young lord’s father’s house, and the inappropriate character of Keikai’s movement back to an outward heroic attitude in the battle at Mii-dera. At the same time, this tale itself demonstrates the scope of the theory of midlife transition, linking “A Long Tale” to a wide range of other stories, e.g., the *Odyssey* and—taking *story* in a broad sense—case material discussed by both Stein and Henderson.

The interpretive power and scope demonstrated by this part of analytic psychology suggests that the academic study of religion may find other aspects of analytic psychology to be of equal power and scope in interpreting religious phenomena. The criteria of interpretive power and scope apply to the interpretive approach as such. Any particular interpretation, particularly one such as that given here, which suggests a significant expansion of the scope for the application of analytical psychology, needs to be evaluated against a different kind of criteria, which may be called “interpretive match.” Interpretive match is the question of how well the interpretive theory matches the phenomenon being interpreted, as evidenced for example by the order of events in the story matching the tripartite sequence of the theory. In applying a theory like that of midlife transition to a particular story, there will of course always be points at which the particular and the general do not match—as discussed above under the rubric of “individual problematics.” If such mismatches are significant, then either the interpretation is inappropriate or the theory is in need of revision. If the interpretation is forced, e.g., the theory is only selectively applied or the phenomenon is radically recast so as to better fit the theory, then the interpretation lacks validity. I have attempted to avoid such a Procrustean interpretation here, though my success will of course be subject to the judgments of others.

<sup>17</sup> Clearly the idea of interpretive power is not whether the interpretation produced is unassailable, which may simply indicate that the interpretive approach is tautological.



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# The Search for Things Past in the *Genji monogatari*

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DORIS G. BARGEN

*University of Massachusetts at Amherst*

MARCEL Proust has become the spectre haunting *Genji* studies. There have been many provocative references and a few general observations, but, despite agreement on the importance of the comparison, there has been no critical work specifically devoted to the task of comparing and contrasting Murasaki Shikibu 紫式部 and Marcel Proust. The absence of analysis is surprising because a sustained comparison illuminates both the *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語 and *A la recherche du temps perdu*.<sup>1</sup> In these two classic

This article is the substantially revised version of a paper presented at the "World of Genji" conference at Indiana University in 1982. I would like to thank William J. Tyler and Janet A. Walker for their advice and encouragement.

<sup>1</sup> Among the earliest perceptive, if still cryptic, comparative insights are those by Donald Keene, in his *Japanese Literature: An Introduction for Western Readers* (New York: Grove Press, 1955), pp. 75-78; and those by Ivan Morris, in his pioneering cultural background study to the *Genji monogatari*, *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan* (1964; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), passim. Less convincing in the attempt to grapple with the formidable concept of time is Armando Martins Jancira, "The Idea of Time in the Japanese and Western Novel: Proust and Murasaki," *France-Asie/Asia*, No. 197 (1969), pp. 127-34; *Japanese and Western Literature: A Comparative Study* (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 1970). The first book-length literary study in English on the *Genji* mentions the translation of Proust's work into Japanese as an instrument for revitalizing interest in Murasaki Shikibu; see Norma Field, *The Splendor of Longing in the Tale of Genji* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 8 and p. 309, n. 5. Another important comprehensive study leaves its single bold comparative statement unexplored: "In contrast to Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, to which the *Genji* has been frequently compared, man is unable to conquer or trans-

works sexual preoccupation is, to a remarkable degree, symbolically incestuous,<sup>2</sup> grounded in excessive love, and determined by intricate family histories. As in the story of Phaidra and Hippolytos,<sup>3</sup> both Murasaki's and Proust's heroes suffer wounds from the past. These wounds motivate sexual behavior marked by image transference and compulsive regressive shifts from loved one to primary substitute to secondary substitute. Finally, frustrated love stimulates a search for the past which is a major theme of Murasaki's book and the title of Proust's.

#### MYTH MAKERS

*The Tale of Genji* begins with the fateful passion of the Old

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scend external time." Haruo Shirane, *The Bridge of Dreams: A Poetics of 'The Tale of Genji'* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), pp. 130-31. Proust scholars have compared *A la recherche du temps perdu* to works by many writers but not to Murasaki; see Victor E. Graham, *Bibliographie des études sur Marcel Proust et son Oeuvre* (Genève: Droz, 1976), and the *MLA International Bibliography*. A study of art and nature in the two novels came to my attention too late for consideration; see Shirley Mescher Loui, "Murasaki and Proust: Time and Again—A Comparison of *The Tale of Genji* and *A la recherche du temps perdu*," Diss. Washington University 1987.

<sup>2</sup> The definition of incest is a difficult matter as it greatly varies from culture to culture. In addition, historical changes in attitude combined with the subversive nature of incest make it impossible to ascertain its universal laws and to distinguish between degrees of taboo violation, which, except in the case of the very nearest blood relatives, seem to rest on a rather arbitrary basis when compared cross-culturally. The aim of this study cannot be to determine whether incest was practiced widely or how it was judged in Murasaki's and Proust's time; rather, the focus will be on the psychological ramifications of symbolic incest in the fictive world of the authors discussed, that is, on desires that shed light on a universal taboo. For a discussion of "The Incest Problem," cf. Robin Fox, *Kinship and Marriage: An Anthropological Perspective* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), pp. 54-76.

<sup>3</sup> While Racine's Thésée openly accuses his son of adultery and incest (cf. *Phèdre*, IV, 2), it is unclear whether marriage between a woman and her stepson was regarded by the Greeks as incestuous; see Euripides, *Hippolytos*, ed. William Spencer Barrett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 12, n. 1. By virtue of the fact that Proust uses Racine rather than Euripides as a source, the theme of incest gains in emphasis. According to McCullough, carnal relations between stepparents and stepchildren in Heian times were "disapproved [. . .] considered wrong, but not completely out of the question." William H. McCullough, "Japanese Marriage Institutions in the Heian Period," *HJAS* 27 (1967): 135, 136. Thus step-relationships fall into the shadowy region between the "unthinkable" (McCullough, p. 135) sexual affairs between parents and children or brothers and sisters on the one hand, and all other unrestricted relationships with more distant blood relatives on the other hand. The authors who portray step-affairs make the unthinkable thinkable by hinting at the taboo of incest while keeping a safe distance from it. This is true, at least, of the authors discussed here.

Emperor for his favorite, but low-ranking consort, Kiritsubo. From this excessive love, Genji is born. Genji's sexual orientation<sup>4</sup> is imprinted into his infant's consciousness by his parents' passion. His pursuit of a mother figure in his love affairs is motivated by the loss, at the age of two, of his mother, whom his father continues to venerate. The ominous exclusiveness of the Old Emperor's love for Kiritsubo is widely perceived as the mirror image of the Chinese emperor Hsüan Tsung's love for Yang Kuei-fei at the peak (718-756) of the T'ang Dynasty. This love, symbolic of a period of growing political chaos and discontent, led to a historic uprising in An Lu-shan's rebellion (755), the flight of the Emperor, and the death of his concubine. By Murasaki Shikibu's time (?973-?1014), the historic events were transformed into myth and well known through Po Chü-i's "Song of Unending Sorrow" or *Ch'ang hen ko* 長恨歌.<sup>5</sup> Murasaki's *monogatari*, however, goes far beyond an isolated instance of love's excess and its political consequences. In her fictional portrait of an age, the theme of excessive love, introduced in the brief episode of the Kiritsubo Emperor's archetypal variant on the Chinese legend, is repeated over three generations, beginning with Genji's. With each generation, the theme grows in psychological complexity and tragic implications.

The beginning of the *Genji*, as established by literary tradition,<sup>6</sup> is indeed deceptively matter-of-fact about events of grave impact. Genji and his stepmother Fujitsubo commit symbolic incest.<sup>7</sup> Since it is

<sup>4</sup> This term is used in the general psychoanalytical sense (to refer to the libido's object) and not in the narrow political sense (to distinguish between heterosexuality and homosexuality).

<sup>5</sup> Concentrating on purely descriptive comparative moments, Lin Wen-yueh traces elements from the first chapter of *The Tale of Genji* to Po Chü-i's poem; see "The Tale of Genji and The Song of Enduring Woe," trans. Diana Yu, 1973; rpt. *Renditions: A Chinese-English Translation Magazine*, No. 5 (Autumn 1975), pp. 38-49. For an extended analysis, see David Pollack, "The Informing Image: 'China' in *Genji Monogatari*," *MN* 38.4 (1983): 360-75; rpt. in Pollack, *The Fracture of Meaning: Japan's Synthesis of China from the Eighth through the Eighteenth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion on "The Order of the Early Chapters in the *Genji monogatari*," see Aileen Gatten, in *HJAS* 41.1 (1981): 5-46; cf. also, Shirane, *The Bridge of Dreams*, pp. 56-62 passim, pp. 120-23.

<sup>7</sup> The apparent differences between the son-stepmother-father triangles depicted by Euripides in his tragedy and by Murasaki in her novel are illuminating in respect to the characters' motives for incestuous desire, their attitude toward it, their solution and punishment. In his comparative study of "The Hippolytus Triangle, East and West," Donald

said that the Emperor Hsüan Tsung had originally intended Yang Kuei-fei for one of his sons,<sup>8</sup> Genji's incestuous love is an even closer analogy to the Chinese legend than his parents' excessive but otherwise legitimate passion. With this form of illicit love, Genji does more than break a moral taboo; he violates a social and religious taboo.<sup>9</sup> To the pursuit of a mother figure is added the cuckolding of the father on the one hand and the blasphemous offense against the sun goddess Amaterasu-ōmikami on the other. The child born from the incestuous union, namely, the future Reizei Emperor, becomes the living memento of Genji's triple offense. What saves Genji from public disgrace—and Fujitsubo with him—is his ability to keep secret his passion and its illicit fruit.

In a society with a complex marital structure in constant flux,<sup>10</sup> Genji practices polygyny more than did his father. While his love demonstrates image transference (attraction facilitated by physical resemblance), he avoids the monomaniacal fixation on one person at a time which had caused his father so much distress. Instead, whenever he anticipates the loss of one beloved person, he prepares for the possession of the next.

Despite some discontent with and criticism of his behavior, his

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Keene rejects the Genji-Fujitsubo affair of the *Genji* as an example of the Hippolytos triangle "because of the entirely different overtones" which put little emphasis, at least overtly, on incest; see Keene, in *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, 11 (1962): esp. 166. However, both the Greek tragedy that Keene has in mind as a foil and the *Genji* arise from the protagonists' concern over parental love and deprivation that lead them to step-relationships and image substitution for a solution. In the *Genji* the strong mother fixation behind the Shining Prince's attraction to his stepmother evokes even more clearly the force of incest than Phaidra's pursuit of her husband's image in Hippolytos. In Euripides it is not the aggressive Phaidra but Hippolytos who is under the spell of strong parental fixation, in his case not compelling but inhibiting him, in all matters of heterosexual love. One might say that Racine's triangle is as far apart from Euripides' as Murasaki's. Keene sees the Hippolytos triangle most properly reflected on the stage of the Nō and the Japanese puppet theatre; see Keene, *ibid.*, pp. 167–70.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Werner Speiser, *China: Geist und Gesellschaft* (Baden-Baden: Holle, 1959), p. 142; cf. also Masako Nakagawa Graham, "The Consort and the Warrior: *Yōkihi* [楊貴妃] *Monogatari*," *MN* 45.1 (1990): 9, n. 19. Eugene Eoyang discusses the incest motif in a thematically related Chinese legend: "The Wang Chao-chün [王昭君] Legend: Configurations of the Classic," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 4 (1982): esp. 8, 9, 20.

<sup>9</sup> On the question of taboo-breaking in the *Genji*, see Field, *The Splendor of Longing*, pp. 26–27; cf. also Shirane, *The Bridge of Dreams*, pp. 90–96; 100–103.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Haruko Wakita, "Marriage and Property in Premodern Japan: From the Perspective of Women's History," intro. and trans. Suzanne Gay, *JJS* 10.1 (1984): 73–99.

promiscuity (but not his ventures into incest) was the norm in the judgment of Murasaki Shikibu's contemporaries. Whether or not criticism of Genji by some important female characters can be taken as the author's indirect criticism of her male-dominated society is difficult to ascertain. It can be shown, however, that the psychologically more complex heroes of the second and third generations have lost Genji's capacity for easy image transference. In this respect, Kashiwagi and Kaoru are the most sombre, tragically inclined heroes, especially when compared to the pedestrian Yūgiri and the frivolous Niou, respectively.

One existential condition in particular stimulates the need for image transference and substitution: orphanhood. Although orphanhood does not bear traumatic consequences for Genji, who does not remember his mother, he nonetheless seems motivated by the memory of its hardships when he seeks custody of the child Murasaki. Genji asks Murasaki's grandmother for custody of the child whose mother bore her "just before she died" (90; 1:288).<sup>11</sup>

"I have heard the sad story, and wonder if I might offer myself as a substitute for your late daughter. I was very young when I lost the one who was dearest to me, and all through the years since I have had strange feelings of aimlessness and futility. We share the same fate, and I wonder if I might not ask that we be companions in it." (92; 1:292)

Since Genji is struck by the ten-year-old Murasaki's physical resemblance to both his stepmother and mother, the question arises whether he is motivated by pity or self-pity, by their shared fate or by incestuous image transference, or by a combination thereof.

In order to retain the pose of the Shining Prince after the cuckolding of his imperial father, Genji needs the shrewdness of a politician. Conversely, Genji's sense of political responsibility provides him with a reason to keep the secret of his son, the future Reizei Emperor's incestuous illegitimacy. Because of these immediate concerns, Genji cannot afford to probe into the mysteries of the past. When the secret of paternity is revealed to the Reizei

<sup>11</sup> Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, trans. Edward G. Seidensticker (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 88; cf. p. 90. Quotations from *The Tale of Genji* will be from this translation. Page numbers are included in the text and are followed by volume and page numbers of the edition of Abe Akio 阿部秋生, Akiyama Ken 秋山虔, Imai Gen'e 今井源衛, eds. *Genji monogatari*, NKBZ, vols. 12-17 [*Genji monogatari*, 6 vols.], (Shōgakukan, 1970-76).



Emperor, without Genji's knowledge, it is the troubled son rather than the father who, at least momentarily, becomes obsessed with the past. While the innocent Reizei Emperor may hope to reason his way through the moral maze, Genji prefers not to think about the matter. He in fact continues to believe that the concealment of the Reizei Emperor's identity was successful: "Genji's worries had passed and his great sin had gone undetected" (592; 4:157). However, Genji does do penance at Suma for his love affair with Oborozukiyo, the wife of his half-brother, the then reigning Suzaku Emperor. In Suma a tempest inspires in him fears about "the end of the world" (248; 2:215). The storm also inspires a curious dream in which his deceased father summons him back to court and deters him from suicide, thus releasing him from "brief punishment for certain sins" (250; 2:219). It is as if Genji, repenting a similar but comparatively minor lapse, had miraculously been forgiven for the greatest sin of all, ironically, by his own father. At any event, Genji's boundless happiness and gratitude in response to the dream suggest that he received forgiveness for more than the venal sins for which he originally went into exile.

In *The Tale of Genji*, the discovery, the exploration, and the recreation of myth are divided, with some overlapping, among the myth-maker Genji, the explorer Kaoru, and the re-creator Ukifune. Since Genji abstains from a conscious investigation of the past in order to avoid confrontation with taboos of incest and the equally unthinkable sin against the imperial line, since the middle generation of Yūgiri and Kashiwagi is preoccupied by the unheroic task of trying to extricate itself from the thickets sown by Genji and his contemporaries, it is only in the Uji chapters that Murasaki allows two members of the third generation a Proustian search for the past. Kaoru and Ukifune in particular are detached enough in time and space to contemplate past generations and to begin to understand the implications of excessive and incestuous love. In Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*,<sup>12</sup> however, discovery, exploration, and re-

<sup>12</sup> Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin; vol. III's "Time Regained," trans. Andreas Mayor (New York: Random House, 1981). Quotations will be identified in the text by Roman numerals for volume numbers and Arabic numerals for page numbers. They are followed by references to *A la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. Pierre Clarac and André Ferré, 3 vols., Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1954).

creation of Marcel's private mythology fall to the single figure of the narrator-hero.

Both Marcel and Genji respond in their childhood and youth to external models of excessive love. The myth of Hippolytos in *Phèdre* colors Marcel's childhood, while the Swanns provide the model of excessive love. For Genji, the myth is that of Yang Kuei-fei, and the excessive love that of his father for his mother. The responses of Genji and Marcel to these influences determine their mature behavior and, in Genji's case, the behavior of generations to come.

MYTHS BECOME HISTORY:  
THE DECLINE OF AN AGE

Sexual transgressions and violated taboos can precipitate not only the fall of a family, as in *Phèdre*; they can signal the decline of a whole society and culture. Both Murasaki and Proust portray the social and cultural decline of the times in which they wrote. In particular, the works abound in political antagonisms that split society in two camps and suggest imminent turn-overs of power. In Heian-kyō marital and political intrigues plague rival clans; in Proust's France the Dreyfus affair serves as a lengthy prologue to the chauvinistic hysteria of World War I.

The Shining Prince himself is a symbol of the coming decline. He is in a precarious position as the son of an emperor and an imperial consort of a not very impressive social position [*ito yamugoto naki kiwa ni wa aranu* いとやむごとなき際にはあらぬ, *NKBZ* 1:93] who suffers from intrigues of higher ranking consorts. Genji's transgression has become "socialized" by his defilement of the imperial line so that the Reizei Emperor becomes aware that "things are wrong, out of joint" (342) [*monogokorobosoku rei naranu kokochi namu suru* もの心細く例ならぬ心地なむする, *NKBZ* 2:443]. The heroes of the following two generations feel the problem of birth even more drastically. They must suffer the consequences of their progenitors' excessive love and seek relief from emotional disturbance in an obsessive quest for the significance of the past. The Eighth Prince in particular complicates the quest by misguiding and confusing the heroes of the Uji chapters.

Although he is Genji's half-brother, the Eighth Prince does not

possess the radiance, discretion, or sensitivity that encourage a condoning of Genji's "sin." The Eighth Prince's excessive love for the mother of the two older Uji sisters takes a spiteful turn when, after the death of his beloved wife, he has an affair with her niece, a high-ranking lady-in-waiting, the *chūjō no kimi* 中将の君, and fathers Ukifune. His "self-loathing" (920) [*ai naku sono koto ni oboshi korite* あいなくその事に思し懲りて, *NKBZ* 5:448] for the betrayal of his principal wife and her idolized daughters as well as his lingering attachment to them hinders the pure pursuit of such Buddhist ideals as the detachment from all desire. While in the case of Genji symbolic incest leads to conflicts that are solved within a secular context, with the Eighth Prince the same phenomenon leads to conflicts of this world that prevent religious fulfillment. In other words, in the case of the latter, secular conflicts are hidden by religious ambitions that hinder the pure pursuit of eros.

The Eighth Prince's continuing plight and dogmatic confusion have upsetting effects upon Kaoru and Ukifune. While neither Genji's radiance is without blemish nor the Eighth Prince's heart totally dark, the latter has been perceived sympathetically because of his pathetic nature and religious calling. Scholars have ignored his destructive influence on others in the service of his personal salvation.<sup>13</sup> It is, however, important to recognize that the Eighth Prince becomes an unfortunate role model for the disoriented third generation. While continuing to be fascinated by the priest whose hidden

<sup>13</sup> According to Edwin A. Cranston, "A genuine religious calling is also depicted, exemplified by Prince Hachi." *Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese* 11.2 and 3 (1976): 191. Field cautiously qualifies the Eighth Prince's pious image, underlining the "ironic implications" in his public portrayal as "worldly saint" [*zoku hijiri* 俗聖, *NKBZ* 5:120]. In an apparent effort not to condemn the prince, the critic reassures us that the "Eighth Prince's ambiguities are paltry compared with Genji's." *The Splendor of Longing*, pp. 225; 241. Shirane hints only indirectly at a flaw in the "devout Eighth Prince" by comparing his total neglect of Ukifune unfavorably to Prince Hyōbu's eventual acknowledgment of Murasaki. The Eighth Prince's so-called "lingering attachments" are seen as prototypical of many an ambitious father's lot in the *Genji*. Shirane does not indicate that the Eighth Prince's "'darkness of the heart' (*kokoro no yami* [心の闇])" is best understood as an excess of the norm. *The Bridge of Dreams*, pp. 155; 153; 184; 185; 186. In fact, Shirane stops short of analyzing the Eighth Prince's evocation of the *waka* that shows a parent to be possessive of his child to the point of distraction. Why, considering the Shining Prince's notorious "pseudo-incest" (in Shirane's terminology), should not his half-brother, less favored by fate, find himself in limbo due to incestuous phantasies—repressed desires that alone may explain the contradictory nature of his spiritual legacy?

personal history contains a series of disasters from orphanhood to political frustrations, the younger Uji characters are oppressed rather than inspired by his formidable authority. Especially in the Uji chapters the appropriate image of "drifting" occurs frequently in connection with images of the Uji river, which contains a whirlpool of meanings, such as the flow of time, memory, Lethe, and death.

In *A la recherche du temps perdu*, too, social origins and status frequently stand in an inverse relation. The aristocracy must give way to "the rising tide of democracy" (II, 10; II, 15). No wonder, then, that the aristocracy's obsession with pedigrees seems anachronistic. Here as in the Uji chapters, where the focus moves away from the high nobility in the capital to a fallen prince and fallen princesses in the Uji "wilderness," the high nobility may officially still be in possession of its heroic stature, but for the literary imagination heroes have been replaced by anti-heroes,<sup>14</sup> as it were, whether they are social upstarts or members of the fallen aristocracy. Even outsiders like Mme Verdurin become prominent in a society whose class barriers have been knocked askew. Marcel himself comes from a well-to-do bourgeois family. His ambition to join the *haute volée* of the Faubourg Saint-Germain leads him down the "Guermites Way," which is the symbolic as well as geographic antipode of "Swann's Way."

PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSES TO A DIMINISHED WORLD,  
AND THE MYTH OF LOVE

In the *Recherche* as in the *Genji* social and political ambitions are woven into an intricate network with the psychological need for substitutions and image transferences. When Marcel's grandmother dies, he too dies symbolically. When he is "born again" (II, 358; II, 345), the world has changed as much for him as for Murasaki's characters after the death of the Shining Prince. The deaths of these two important figures (Genji and Marcel's

<sup>14</sup> Takahashi Tōru 高橋亨, for instance, refers to the Kaoru-Ōigimi love relationship as a "*han-monogatari*" 反物語. "Ōigimi no kekkon kyōhi," in *Kōza: Genji monogatari no sekai*, ed. Akiyama Ken 秋山虔, Kimura Masanori 木村正中, Shimizu Yoshiko 清水好子, 9 vols. (Yūhikaku, 1983) [hereafter *KGMS*], 8: 143.

grandmother) help to mythologize them and to strip the aura of myth from their depraved counterparts (the Eighth Prince and Mme de Guermantes). It is no coincidence that Marcel's love for Mme de Guermantes does not long survive his grandmother. Instead, Marcel returns to the type suggested by the dead body of his grandmother, which is, curiously, "the form of a young girl" (II, 357; II, 345). Thus Marcel's fixation on his grandmother, from which he temporarily escaped in his pursuit of Mme de Guermantes, is again evoked in his renewed courtship of Albertine and, ultimately, of Mlle de Saint-Loup, a girl who is at once Saint-Loup's daughter, Swann's granddaughter, and—almost as an illustration of the intricate network of interrelated characters—Mme de Guermantes' great-niece.

Deprivations by separation or death result in an intense feeling of loneliness. To compensate for traumatic loss, the afflicted—most prominently, Marcel, Genji, Kaoru—feel the desire for excessive love which is also symbolically incestuous.<sup>15</sup> *Repeated* deprivation—such as Genji's loss of his mother and then Fujitsubo, Kaoru's loss of three father figures (Genji, Kashiwagi, and the Eighth Prince), Marcel's separation from his mother and then his grandmother—lead to an intensified loneliness, estrangement from society, and, finally, the desire to replace family, group, or clan affiliations by the focus on a single individual. Image transferences may still occur, but they will be less determined by intimate family connections, e.g., Kaoru's specific attachment to Ukifune (the last of the Uji sisters), and Marcel's pursuit of Albertine.<sup>16</sup> All these particular

<sup>15</sup> Often the deceased or otherwise "lost" persons are close relatives or marital partners. Jean Racine's Phèdre, for instance, seeks the faithless Thésée's image in Hippolyte; see Racine, *Oeuvres Complètes: Théâtre, Poésies*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), I, 3, p. 777: "Mes yeux le retrouvaient dans les traits de son père." (Cf. *ibid.*, II, 5, p. 788.) Francesco Orlando recognizes the importance of image transferences: "The importance of Hippolytus' physical resemblance to the young Theseus in Phaedra's eyes may suggest problems with the character's history: problems of age, chronology, psychology." Cf. *Toward a Freudian Theory of Literature: With an Analysis of Racine's Phèdre*, trans. Charmaine Lee (1st Italian eds., 1972, 1973; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1978), p. 49; cf. also pp. 50, 69ff. However, only forbidden substitutions through family resemblance affect the passions. In Proust, matrimony excludes passion, as shown in the case of Swann and Odette, but other habitual relationships suffer a loss of passion as well, to the extent that they provide security: "affairs of long standing have something of the sweetness and strength of *family* affection" (I, 505; I, 468–69—my italics).

<sup>16</sup> While Ukifune is indeed the daughter of the Eighth Prince and strongly resembles him

bonds are solipsistic if not narcissistic in so far as the partners not only withdraw from larger social issues but also seek to share the same introverted sexual inclination, a concern for the past, and an indifference to physical reproduction.

For Genji, the trauma of parental death nearly coincides with the traumatic circumstances of his birth. Other characters make the traumatic connection between birth and death more consciously, later in life, as, for instance, Marcel, Kaoru, and Ukifune. None of the above, with the exception of Genji, has children, and Genji is puzzled by the fact that his progeny are so few. In his relationship with Murasaki he precludes the dangers of excessive love by dispersing his affections among several women, as was common in Heian times. His amorous diversification appears almost designed to avoid future "sins" and to avert the downfall of an age, which Chinese legend has shown obsessions can cause. As Genji had been fortunate in keeping his "sin" a secret from the general public, he may have unconsciously felt compelled to divert to others a portion of his boundless love for Murasaki—in the interest of society and to atone for his "sin." Can it be merely a coincidence that he dreams at Suma of his father's forgiveness and is inspired to father the future Akashi Empress, far away from court and near the place of repentance? It is as if Murasaki waited at home as a living reminder of the past.

Kaoru seeks also to comprehend the past and to atone for parental sins rather than to devote himself to promiscuity and procreation, which is what society expects of him: "longing to know the facts of his birth, Kaoru had prayed that he might one day have a clear explanation" (795; 5:151). A clear causal connection is established between "the old doubts" concerning his birth and his sexual "reserve," his "strain of melancholy that kept him from losing himself in romantic dalliance" (740; 5:23-4). Known and ridiculed as "Lord Proper" for his prudishness and long-lasting

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physically, it must be remembered that the Eighth Prince is no blood relation of Kaoru, as the latter eventually finds out. Yet it is precisely because Kaoru knows that the pursuit of the Eighth Prince and his daughters entails an imaginary search for the past that he clings with special ardor to the last of his Uji loves. Albertine, an orphan with few social connections and support, also carries implications of being the last in the succession of Marcel's loves. She too is made to substitute for various people (Gilberte, grandmother, and mother), and her resistance and elusiveness bind the hero ever more desperately to her.

bachelorhood, Kaoru surrenders to social pressures<sup>17</sup> and marries only when he feels abandoned by his male companion, Niou, who reluctantly succumbs to princely duties and produces an heir for the throne. Niou's wife, Nakanokimi, the middle of the Uji sisters, devotes herself to maternity and restricts her spiritual intimacy with Kaoru. Not surprisingly, there are no children from Kaoru's own formalistic marriage to the Second Princess.<sup>18</sup> Even more than in the case of Murasaki's regretted childlessness, Kaoru's voluntary abstinence demonstrates that his obsessions are with the past rather than the future.

Kaoru's compulsion to solve the riddle of the past is reinforced by his growing awareness of a society in decline. His resistance to the degenerate standards of the age is reflected in his role as "the fragrant captain" (740; 5:22). Competitions in scents are only one indication of the state of Heian arts. While Niou's blend of perfumes consists of a highly exaggerated concoction which stirs allegations of "a certain preciousness" (740; 5:22), Kaoru is known for his natural fragrance.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the telling fragrance metaphorically expresses Kaoru's inability—if not his refusal—to play a social role: "He could not hide. Let him step behind something in hopes of going unobserved, and that scent would announce his presence" (739; 5:21).

<sup>17</sup> Shirane holds that Kaoru should earlier in the story have been accepted by Ōigimi as "a man who appears to be, by almost all standards, an ideal marriage partner." *The Bridge of Dreams*, p. 142.

<sup>18</sup> This Second Princess [Onna ni no miya or Fujitsubo no miya] seems to be as unimportant to Kaoru as the neglected wife [Ochiba no miya] of his father Kashiwagi had been. Aside from being his wife's cousin, Kaoru is set up to marry a "type" like his mother by virtue of the fact that the Kinjō Emperor worries about the Second Princess much as his father (the former Suzaku Emperor) had worried about the Third Princess (Kaoru's mother); cf. 885-87; 5:364-67.

<sup>19</sup> For "the role of scent in determining [. . .] personalities" (p. 40), see Aileen Gatten, "A Wisp of Smoke," *MN* 32.1 (1977): 35-48. The differences between Niou and Kaoru in the art of scents are interpreted by Gatten more to Kaoru's than to Niou's disadvantage. Kaoru's natural fragrance is deplored as "a source of embarrassment. Unable to conduct love affairs in the secrecy appropriate to the times, Kaoru is forced by his inescapable fragrance to become shy with women, aloof from society, and overly interested in religion" (ibid., p. 41). It is debatable whether Kaoru's fragrance is a "source" of what Gatten apparently considers to be defects of his personality, or whether his superior natural fragrance is linked to a noble quest for the past and thus casts a more positive light on Kaoru's character and social role. Although Gatten's essay indicates that Niou falls short in the proper use of scents, the varying quality of this particular art in *The Tale of Genji* is not seen as a barometer, as it were, for the morale of Heian society.

There is, therefore, tragic irony in his idolization of the Eighth Prince as his chosen father because this confounded figure is responsible for Kaoru's dangerously self-defeating obsession with the past.<sup>20</sup> Kaoru's implied homoerotic inclinations<sup>21</sup> are the result of an almost hysterical desire not to repeat the sins of the fathers. Namely, what Kaoru's three father figures share in their most passionate affairs is the responsibility for their offspring's confused sense of identity. Thus the Reizei Emperor must silently bear the psychological weight of Genji's incestuous affair with Fujitsubo; Kaoru's identity problem is rooted in Kashiwagi's adulterous passion for the Third Princess, and, finally, it is Ukifune who most poignantly mirrors the plight of an illegitimate and unacknowledged child and who suffers from being the fruit of an affair that symbolizes the Eighth Prince's betrayal of his idolized *kita no kata*.

Kaoru breaks with the common pattern of arranged marriages and adulterous love by image fixation through family resemblance. Originally, his attraction (incestuous and homoerotic) to the Eighth Prince constituted an image transference of the traditional kind, in this specific case, from his assumed father Genji to Genji's half-brother. When Kaoru learns that Kashiwagi was his real father, he nonetheless continues to venerate the memory of a wholly imaginary father figure at Uji as the key to an understanding of the past. Curiously, the problems embedded in Kaoru's origins are foreshadowed by the experience of the Reizei Emperor, his guardian. Reizei is bound by his high office to neglect his filial duties and

<sup>20</sup> Kaoru is not entirely unable to imagine an alternative to his life-style, but such intuition as when he sees Nakanokimi's child and wishes it were his is rare:

If only it were his, thought Kaoru—not, it would seem having entirely given up thoughts of this world. If the one for whom he longed [i.e., Ōigimi] had followed the way of the world and left behind a child, he might find consolation. And such were the workings of his intractable heart that he had had no thought over the days of the possibility that his well-born wife might have a child. Still, one would not wish to describe him as merely perverse. (928; 5:467)

<sup>21</sup> Kaoru seems to have felt an intense longing for the "womanish" (779; 5:116) Eighth Prince whom he visits for three years without noticing his daughters. After the death of the Eighth Prince, Kaoru thinks of Wigbeard, formerly a close associate of the Prince, when visiting the Prince's chapel, and seems to treat Wigbeard as more than a companion in grief (cf. 817; 5:202; 819 and n. 7; 5:207). During the Prince's lifetime, Kaoru had sent Wigbeard a robe of unmistakable fragrance. There are numerous allusions to the homoerotic attraction between Kaoru and Niou, as the latter suggests, "actually we have been closer than close" (984; 6:127).



to pretend, by keeping the “secret” of his illegitimacy, that the imperial line is pure. Kaoru might have venerated his father’s memory but chooses instead to honor thus the late Eighth Prince, his self-chosen father figure.

When the Eighth Prince dies, Ōigimi becomes his first substitute, because she resembles him more than does Nakanokimi. It is important to note that Kaoru, upon Ōigimi’s death, is first drawn to her younger sister, but, since she resembles her mother, the attraction consists of friendship rather than passion. Through Nakanokimi’s mediation, Kaoru learns of Ukifune, who is said to bear a striking resemblance to her father and, by inference, to Ōigimi. If in chronological terms Ōigimi is the Eighth Prince’s first substitute, Ukifune becomes his second. In other words, the general assumption that Kaoru selected Ukifune to be the late Ōigimi’s substitute suffers from an important oversight, namely, that Ōigimi is not Kaoru’s original choice for his affections. It is precisely this unexplored complexity of Ōigimi’s role as substitute for her late father that had inhibited her and Kaoru from entering into a conventional love relationship.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, it is no accident that the narrative is interspersed with timely resurgences of the memory of Kaoru’s original point of reference, the Eighth Prince, just as he hears tantalizing bits of news about Ukifune. And, while it has been pointed out that Ukifune’s first appearance on the scene is intimately connected with Ōigimi through the imagery of the Uji Bridge,<sup>23</sup> it is equally significant that Kaoru is moved by the fact that Ukifune is just returning from a pilgrimage to Hatsuse where she prayed for her father (cf. 921, 932, 935). In short, Ukifune is not merely Ōigimi’s substitute, but, less obviously, her father’s double. Conversely, Kaoru, being the

<sup>22</sup> Takahashi Tōru has argued that the Kaoru-Ōigimi love relationship develops in the context of the Eighth Prince’s will, which serves Ōigimi not only as an argument against marriage but also as a way to be reunited with her father in death. See “Ōigimi no kekkon kyōhi,” 8:156–57.

<sup>23</sup> Fujii Sadakazu’s 藤井貞和 essay on Ukifune as a substitute begins with the assumption that Kaoru selected her to be the late Ōigimi’s substitute: “*Naki Ōigimi o shitau Kaoru ga migawari to shite muidashita Ukifune no koto de aru.*” Fujii, “Katashiro Ukifune,” in *KGMS* 8:276. For Kaoru’s first glimpse of Ukifune, see *ibid.*, p. 286. Fujii’s argument that Ōigimi must, in order to associate with Kaoru, avail herself of the shape of a sister from a different mother (see *ibid.*, p. 284) indirectly underscores my argument that Ukifune’s and Ōigimi’s shared resemblance to their father is the main point here.

Prince's disciple and having adopted his manners if not his mannerisms, represents a "return" of the father for Ukifune (on a literally subconscious level, as she never knew the Eighth Prince). Although Kaoru's pursuit of these two Uji sisters is founded on their family resemblance to his male paragon, the Eighth Prince, it is a doomed and delusory effort because he cannot possibly find a father substitute in them. Nonetheless, by his obsession with Uji, Kaoru gradually overcomes the conflict between sexual abstinence preached by the Eighth Prince and his personal need for "kindred spirits" (834) [*itodo waga kokoro koyoite oboyureba* いとどわが心通ひておほゆれば, NKBZ 5:241] in an otherwise unbearably lonely quest for the truth.

By warning Kaoru as well as his two favorite daughters, Ōigimi and Nakanokimi, against carnal desire (cf. 805; 5:172; 806; 5:176-7), the Eighth Prince unwittingly stimulated awareness of their sexual dilemma.<sup>24</sup> Yet awareness is not enough to effect sexual fulfillment. Ōigimi is dominated by her father and dies a virgin, grieving for him and worrying over her younger sister Nakanokimi's involvement with the faithless Niou. By contrast, Nakanokimi resembles her mother, who designated the infant as a "keepsake" or *katami* 形見 (776; 5:111) just before she died in childbirth. Under the influence and protection of her mother's last will, Nakanokimi alone among the Uji sisters has enough distance from her father to escape from his possessive sphere.<sup>25</sup> Thus her departure from Uji and her marriage may violate her father's wishes, but they actually do no more than throw her notion of the "past and future [. . .] into a meaningless jumble" (898; 5:392).

While Nakanokimi's drama is played low key, Ōigimi's and Ukifune's stories reach tragic proportions. Despite the fact that Ukifune is unrecognized by her father and deemed unworthy of indoctrination against the other sex, she provokes his resentful spirit by loving the two men (Niou and Kaoru) who have been intimately involved with his legitimate daughters.<sup>26</sup> A male possessing spirit

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Hasegawa Masaharu 長谷川政春, "Uji jūjō no sekai, Hachinomiya no yuigon no jubakusei," *Kokugakuin zasshi* (Oct. 1970), rpt. in *Genji monogatari IV*, Nihon bungaku kenkyū shiryō sōsho series (Yūseidō, 1982), pp. 135-44.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 140, 143.

<sup>26</sup> Hasegawa argues that the Uji world is governed by the concept of the last will instead of

has to be accounted for in Ukifune's possession case, a rare phenomenon in the *Genji*. If Kaoru's infatuation with Ukifune is confined to the idea that she is Ōigimi's sole substitute, and if Fujii's thesis that Ōigimi, metaphorically speaking, desired Ukifune's flesh [*"Ōigimi wa Ukifune no niku o hoshita"*]<sup>27</sup> holds, then one should expect Ōigimi to have possessed Ukifune. However, spirit possession typically does not follow the path of logic but of "oblique aggressive strategy."<sup>28</sup> Instead of being haunted by her half-sister, Ukifune, obsessed as she is with longing for her real father, becomes vulnerable to his wandering spirit. However, Ukifune survives the crisis brought on by her excessive love and exemplifies a radical way to cope with the past, namely, by artistic withdrawal.<sup>29</sup>

If the traumata of birth and death evoke two incompatible forces, namely, an excessive desire for love and an obsession with the past that makes conventional love all but impossible and tends to exclude procreation, the conflict of forces can be mediated by a third factor. Through the imagination psychological conflicts can be transcended. However, the imagination, depending on the character in question, has various uses ranging from self-delusion to artistic creation.

Like *Genji* and Kaoru, Proust's Marcel is exposed to repeated deprivations which challenge his imaginative resources. Prevarication in order to obtain his mother's good-night kiss is soon replaced by more refined imaginative techniques, such as image substitution. To prevent procreation, which is betrayal of the past, Marcel, like Kaoru in particular, loves the inaccessible.

Inaccessibility is often ensured by the presence of a rival. While amorous rivals are ordinarily undesirable, here they are welcomed and needed. With his self-defeating strategy, Kaoru practically incites Niou to whisk away from him one Uji sister after another. When he finally wants Ukifune for himself alone, it is because he the resentful spirits who had haunted *Genji*'s world at court: "*Uji jūjō no sekai wa, hikaru Genji no sekai ni miru onryō no juryoku kara kaihō sarete iru ga, kawari ni 'kotoba' ni yoru jubaku no sekai de atta.*" Ibid., pp. 140-41. In fact, in Ukifune's possession the two worlds may be seen to merge when a resentful possessing spirit returns to protest a broken will.

<sup>27</sup> Fujii, "Katashiro Ukifune," p. 284.

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed explanation of this anthropological definition of spirit possession, see Ioan Myrddin Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), pp. 32-33, 86, 117, 133.

<sup>29</sup> For the change from applied to non-utilitarian arts, in the Uji chapters, see Earl Miner, "The Living Arts in *The Tale of Genji*," (International *Genji* Conference, Bloomington: Indiana University, August 1982).

can be safe from the threat of excessive love. She is in a trance and it is only via the allegorical Bridge of Dreams, i.e., in the realm of the imagination, that he can join her.

Both Proust and Murasaki depict triangular love relationships with a specific psychological complexity and creative aftermath. These love affairs are dramatized in a unique way. In Proust's novel, Marcel's male role models are men who pursue inaccessible or inappropriate women. Swann is bewitched by Odette, Saint-Loup by Rachel. When Marcel falls in love, it is with Albertine, the leader of the androgynous band at Balbec, a girl whom Marcel suspects of lesbianism. Baron Charlus' homosexual affair with Morel is another *mésalliance*. In the *Recherche*, therefore, as in the *Genji*, love's inaccessibility is ensured not in the conventional way—by political animosities, marriage politics, or social intrigues—but by the fact that the lovers choose partners not of the same but of different sexual proclivities so that heterosexuals love homosexuals or bisexuals, and vice versa. This peculiarity of the protagonists' sexual orientation is deeply rooted in traumata of birth and death which in turn cause their obsession with the past through image substitution.

As with Marcel and Albertine, the association of disturbed sexuality and inaccessibility appears in *The Tale of Genji* as well, especially in the Uji chapters. Here it is the homosexually inclined male protagonist, Kaoru, who is drawn to Ukifune because she, among the daughters of the Eighth Prince, most resembles her father. So great is the resemblance that Kaoru identifies the two—indirectly, via the *tertium comparationis* of Ōigimi. His emphasis is not on the living woman in front of him but on the deceased idol: "He wanted to go in immediately and say to her: 'So you were deceiving us. You are still alive'" (934) [*yo no naka ni owashikeru mono o, to iinagusamemahoshi* 世の中におはしけるものを、と言ひ慰めまほし, *NKBZ* 5:481].<sup>30</sup> To assume the deceased idol to be Ōigimi is the

<sup>30</sup> Kaoru's imaginary encounter is instantly linked to the Chinese legend, specifically to excessive love after the death of the beloved (who, in Kaoru's case, most immediately points to Ōigimi but originally refers to the Eighth Prince). In this scene, Ukifune is generally seen to recall Ōigimi only, see *NKBZ* 5:481, n. 16. Yet in a concurrent conversation, Bennokimi entices Kaoru into reflections on deeper levels of his quest by telling him of Ukifune's temple visit and her longing for her late father (cf. 935): "*tada suginishi onkehai o tazune kikoyuru yue ni nan habemeru,*" *NKBZ* 5:482.

standard interpretation which seriously detracts from the complexities surrounding Kaoru's and Ōigimi's Platonic love relationship. It appears that especially in the Uji chapters various levels of analogous relationships need to be explored, even across generational lines, to reach to the depths of character motivation. Thus, in so far as Kaoru seeks in Ukifune, "this last sad foundling" (1023; 6:219), either a father or a brother, his love bears incestuous and homosexual features.

However, there is a possibility that Kaoru for once is drawn into the ways of the world, sexually, at Ukifune's Eastern Cottage which seems "a house apart from this gloomy world" (963; 6:77). Indeed it is a safe place from the haunts of the past.<sup>31</sup> Here Kaoru's intentions of making Ukifune a substitute for Ōigimi are overturned with "a new experience" (967; 6:85) of physical lovemaking that he and Ōigimi had denied themselves out of veneration for the past. Here, amidst the everyday world of ordinary life, yet "unfamiliar" in the vulgarity of "the sleepy voices of peddlers" and women workers as strong as "veritable demons" (967; 6:85),<sup>32</sup> Kaoru momentarily takes Ukifune for who she really is, in isolation from memories of the past. When Kaoru takes Ukifune back to Uji, to repeat the past, as it were, memories return, and Ukifune again seems in danger of neglect. Yet the events at the cottage are not easily reversible. To Kaoru's great astonishment, Ukifune now assumes priority over Ōigimi. Whatever happened at the Eastern Cottage is startlingly different from Kaoru's innocent night with Ōigimi. Then, at the anniversary of the Eighth Prince's death, memories of the past and "the smell of holy incense" (828; 5:226) dominated the love scene and did not permit a consecration of the present through the physical consummation of love. Instead, Kaoru and Ōigimi made a pact to be "curiosities" (828; 5:228) because of their sexual abstinence. Having successfully struggled for so long to remain faithful to the late Ōigimi (and the Eighth Prince, by inference), Kaoru now almost unawares makes the image transference to Ukifune.

<sup>31</sup> For Masuda Shigeo 増田繁夫, the Kaoru-Ōigimi love relationship transcends sexual interests and instead expresses the need for guardianship, a concept inspired by the loss of a shared father figure. See Masuda, "Ōigimi no shi," *KGMS* 8:182-83.

<sup>32</sup> For experiences similar to those of Kaoru, see Shirane, *The Bridge of Dreams*, p. 157. For Marcel, street cries (cf. III, 121-22; III, 126) symbolically express his fear of Albertine's homosexuality.

The objects of image transference, Murasaki's Ukifune and Proust's Albertine, seek to escape from the complications of love relationships characterized by disharmonies in sexual orientation and the obsession with the past. By breaking away from their lovers, both Ukifune and Albertine liberate themselves from the phantoms of the past for whom they were forced to substitute. Ukifune's attempt at suicide fails, but, until her survival is discovered, her lovers must come to terms with her "death." This they do by increasingly absurd image transferences even as they continue to investigate the circumstances of her disappearance.

By contrast, Marcel must come to terms with Albertine's genuine suicide. Like Ukifune, Albertine had been a catalyst for the evocation of the past, for "the perpetual resurgence, at the bidding of identical moments, of moments from the past" (III, 488; III, 478). Significantly, Marcel's courtship of Albertine ends as it began, with references to Balbec and to Racine's *Phèdre*. When a telegram informs him that Albertine "was thrown by her horse against a tree while she was out riding" (III, 485; III, 476), he interprets her death as suicide and acknowledges his complicity: "from my prison she had escaped to go and kill herself on a horse which but for me she would not have owned" (III, 510; III, 500). Previous reflections on *Phèdre* now assume prophetic character.<sup>33</sup>

Despite Proust's allusions to the myth of Phaidra and Hippolytos, his own narrative dispenses with supernatural effects in favor of a modern psychological approach. Murasaki Shikibu retains some elements from folk mythology and popular superstitions, but she too achieves a remarkably high degree of psychological characterization in the *Genji*, especially in the Uji chapters. Ukifune's possession by a demonic spirit owes something to the world of the supernatural, but the author's treatment of the scene (cf. 1044-6; VI, 269-71), in which a bewildered public clumsily tries to come

<sup>33</sup> Marcel's incestuous longing for an Albertine who is inaccessible by virtue of her homosexual proclivities, his jealousies and outbreaks of malevolence resemble *Phèdre*'s passion for the equally inaccessible and unlucky Hippolyte who, like Albertine, is killed by his own horses. For the parallel between Marcel and *Phèdre*, see René de Chantal, *Marcel Proust: Critique Littéraire* II (Montréal: Les Presses de L'Université de Montréal, 1967), pp. 404-8. Furthermore, Albertine's death has been linked to the death of Proust's lover Alfred Agostinelli, who was given an airplane by Proust but was unable to control it, as Proust had feared. Cf. J. E. Rivers, *Proust and the Art of Love: The Aesthetics of Sexuality in the Life, Times, and Art of Marcel Proust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 88-89.

to grips with the transfigured figure under the tree by identifying her or her possessor with a fox or wood spirit, is apparently meant to be grotesque, while the possession, its cause and its aftermath are not. More importantly, the exorcism of the spirit of her father<sup>34</sup> and Ukifune's survival represent a triumph of rationality which is further explored in the psychological analysis of Ukifune's difficult recovery from her dramatic confrontation with the past.<sup>35</sup>

#### MYTH RE-CREATORS

After making several generations of fictional characters, or individuals in the different phases of their lives, relive and repeat a mythic pattern drawn from Po Chū-i or Racine, Murasaki and Proust select one of the characters to carry on the tradition of mythopoeia<sup>36</sup> in a forgetful age and a society in decline.<sup>37</sup> Both

<sup>34</sup> Field's identification of Ukifune's possessing spirit oscillates between Niou, Kaoru, a "conflation" of the two, and "a defrocked priest." See Field, *The Splendor of Longing*, pp. 279-83. Shirane is conspicuously silent on the topic. He is more interested in identifying the historic model [the Tendai priest Genshin 源信 (942-1017)] for the exorcist [Yokawa no Sōzu 横川の僧都] than in the meaning of the possessing spirit for Ukifune. Cf. *The Bridge of Dreams*, pp. 194-99. Mitani Kuniaki 三谷邦明, who recognizes the dubious nature of the Bishop of Yokawa and his entourage of self-centered relatives, comes to the ingenious conclusion that the *mono no ke* 物の怪 (revealed to be an apostate) is a projection of the Bishop as exorcist. The problem with this interpretation is that it does not account for Ōigimi's death or Ukifune's obligatory albeit oblique interconnectedness to the possessing spirit. Mitani explains this incoherence by pointing to fragmentation as a characteristic feature of the Uji section. See Mitani, "Genji monogatari daisanbu no hōhō—chūshin no sōshitsu aruiwa fuzai no monogatari," *Bungaku* 50 (August 1982): 101-103. In my analysis, the shady character of the Bishop not only evokes the character of the Eighth Prince but also serves as a perfect vehicle for exorcizing his spirit.

<sup>35</sup> For the much debated thesis that spirit possession involves an indirect protest against the oppressive forces of society, frequently by women, see Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, passim. Cf. also, Barga, "Yūgao: A Case of Spirit Possession in *The Tale of Genji*," *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 19.3 (1986): 15-24; Barga, "Spirit Possession in the Context of Dramatic Expressions of Gender Conflict: the Aoi Episode of the *Genji monogatari*," *HJAS* 48.1 (1988): 95-130. For a discussion of the case of Murasaki no ue, see Shirane, *The Bridge of Dreams*, pp. 114-16.

<sup>36</sup> Murasaki and Proust further set themselves apart from the *tertium comparationis* of Euripides and Racine by a metafictional solution to the problematic of excessive love, sexual disturbances, and a quest for the past. Edmund Wilson points out that André Gide's *Philoctète*, a version of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, allows the outcast hero who suffers from the wounds of the past to resort to a similar metafictional solution. Gide's Philoctète becomes "a literary man: at once a moralist and an artist, whose genius becomes purer and deeper in

Murasaki and Proust employ repetition as a structural element "to suggest a fresh truth" (I, 955; I, 894).<sup>38</sup>

Repetitious events occur at different times and in different social contexts and never affect the same person in the same way. For example: Kaoru's loss of his three father figures affects him differently from his literal and symbolical losses of the three Uji sisters; Marcel loses both his grandmother and Albertine twice, first literally and then symbolically (and, one is tempted to anticipate, a third time in the self-construed third dimension of his fiction). In this way successive analogous events are reminders of the past, hence the frequency of regressions toward childhood and adolescence.<sup>39</sup> These reworkings are, in fact, a literary analogue to the psychoanalytic method.<sup>40</sup>

Winding his way through a complex system of image transferences or substitutions, Kaoru seeks in Ukifune his last chance for fatherly love; and Marcel's pursuit of Albertine recalls his anxious

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ratio to his isolation and outlawry." Wilson, "Philoctetes: The Wound and the Bow," in *The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 289.

<sup>37</sup> The arts in general are depicted to have fallen into decline. In the *Genji*, Niou, who has more respect for Kaoru's artistic talent than for his own, becomes critical and suspicious of the prizes bestowed on him and thinks the assembly overvalues his poetry (cf. 990; 6:139-40). In the *Recherche*, Marcel, always critical of public appreciation of the arts, himself becomes increasingly disappointed in the declining power of artists in their old age and their fame, as, for example, Elstir, Bergotte, and Berma.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Morris, *The World of the Shining Prince*, p. 278. Cf. also Edward W. Said, "On Repetition," in *The Literature of Fact*, ed. Angus Fletcher (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), pp. 145, 152. [Said quotes from Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology*, trans. Walter Lowrie (1941; rpt. New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 135.] One Proust scholar has pointed to the tension produced by the "dialectical movement" in the stylistic trait of repetition which is seen as "homologous to . . . binary opposition." Robert W. Greene, "Quotation, Repetition, and Ethical Competence in *Un Amour de Swann*," *Contemporary Literature* 25.2 (1984): 152. Concerning the Uji chapters, see the references to "quotation" in Field, *The Splendor of Longing*, pp. 230, 235, 246.

<sup>39</sup> Concerning the connection between the possible development of an artistic sensibility and repeated regression to childhood and adolescence, see W. Bräutigam, "Anthropologie der Neurose (unter Benutzung von Franz Kafkas 'Brief an den Vater')," pp. 114-37; in *Philosophische Anthropologie I*, ed. Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Vogler (Stuttgart/München: Thieme; Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1975), pp. 133-34.

<sup>40</sup> The structural peculiarity of "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through" is also that of psychoanalysis; cf. Freud, *Stand. Ed.* 12:145-56; and "Working Through" in J. Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1974), pp. 488-89.



need to possess his mother and grandmother. In addition, repetitions occur as cross references. For instance, Murasaki and Ukifune are both rejected by their fathers, and their alleged deaths are associated with possession by evil spirits, even if that is where the analogy ends. In Proust's novel, Albertine's violent death foreshadows Saint-Loup's death in World War I, both deaths suspected to be suicides.

Albertine's death, twice experienced, inspires Marcel to become a writer and to explore this "faint allegory of countless other separations" (III, 516; III, 506) with new means, in seclusion from the world. When choosing his reclusive vocation, Marcel withdraws from society. When Ukifune survives her attempt at suicide and turns to art for an understanding of the mysterious crises of her birth, "death," and "rebirth," she conforms to one of the strongest cultural imperatives of Heian times. For both Ukifune and Marcel the survival of their own symbolical deaths may, as one critic says about Proust's hero, signify "both the loss of self and the creation of a new, stronger identity (the artist)" and constitute "an elaborate attempt to reverse the authority of the past over the present, to overcome past anxieties by 'replaying' them under new ground rules."<sup>41</sup>

In both Murasaki and Proust, the agony and relief of remembering and forgetting traumatic events begins anew, with one difference: for the "reborn" Ukifune and for Marcel the survivor art becomes the alternative to love. The phase of experience is

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Randolph Splitter, "Proust's Myth of Artistic Creation," *American Imago* 37 (1980): 410, 411. In his psychoanalytical analysis, Splitter transforms the Marcel at the end of the *Recherche* into a dying mother figure: "Marcel now adopts [his mother's] magical powers as his own and imagines himself to be this artist-mother who gives birth to a work of art. But in so doing he becomes like a sick, dying mother—like his own self-sacrificing grandmother" (p. 397). By extension of this overwrought argument, Ukifune would, after the exorcism of the evil spirit, be endowed with her father's magical powers over her—for two diametrically opposed purposes: religion (which turns her away from the world) and art (which symbolizes her link with the world through her introspective poetic exercises). While her former religious devotion may be a direct result of her possession and in the spirit of the Eighth Prince who loathed himself and the world more than he emulated the Buddha, art is a result of her conflict with her lovers and the resolution to die. My interpretation of Marcel's and Ukifune's artistic inspirations points not *directly* to the parental figures of whose love they have been deprived but *indirectly*, through the inaccessibility of their lovers (who are, moreover, closely related to the heroes' parental image fixations). Figures like Niou and Kaoru, or Albertine and Mlle de Saint-Loup, are, despite their elusiveness, inspiring mediators between the terrors of the past and the present.

followed by a phase of seclusion and artistic creation. Despite the seclusion Ukifune seeks at the nunnery and Marcel in the sanatorium, there are occasional voluntary or involuntary exposures to the declining society around them. Ukifune falls prey to matchmaking as those who waked her from her suicide trance reveal their selfishness. The bishop's sister abuses Ukifune by coercing her into the role of her late daughter, and the bishop's mother shocks the nuns by her impious frivolities that seem to support the Buddhist notion of the law in its deteriorating phase (*mappō* 末法). Similarly, Marcel's arrival at his last Guermentes party sounds the depressing death-knell of an era. However, for both melancholy protagonists, there is the hopeful possibility of recapturing lost values through creativity and, simultaneously, of atoning for the unknown sins of the fathers.

Ukifune's inspiration is Kaoru and she is "touched [. . .] to know that she had not been forgotten" (1077; 6:348). Her traumatic experiences have in fact turned her into an ally and kindred spirit of Kaoru, not only in the sense that she has become more preoccupied with "Memories of the past" (1075; 6:343) than before but also in her newly acquired sexual indifference: "Those disastrous events had so turned her against men, it seemed, that she meant to end her days as little a part of the world as a decaying stump" (1074; 6:342). Although news of Kaoru's arrival is accompanied by an acute sense of depersonalization, that is, a dramatic confrontation with her former self and "the strangeness of it all" (1077; 6:348), the encounter with him is psychoanalytically a positive *déjà-vu* experience<sup>42</sup> and promises to open up the mysteries of the past. "Kaoru's superiority" (1077; 6:347) helps to free Ukifune spiritually from her possession by the malevolent spirit of her father in whom excessive love had taken its most vengeful form.

<sup>42</sup> "Depersonalization" and "*déjà vu*" are the negative and positive responses to anxiety or trauma. If Ukifune's spirit possession, on the level of the unconscious, reflects the complex relationship with her father, the appearance of her father's double, Kaoru, recalls the repressed situation of the seizure. Sensing that the new situation is similar but not identical with the old one may eventually lead the heroine to insight but may first of all "create considerable affect by challenging the individual's sense of reality." Rom Harré and Roger Lamb, eds., *The Encyclopedic Dictionary of Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), p. 142. For the complementary function of depersonalization and the *déjà-vu* experience, see Ludwig Eidelberg, ed., *Encyclopedia of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Free Press, 1968), pp. 103, 97-98.

Kaoru himself becomes subject to depersonalization when he, "haunted" by Ukifune's "mystery," takes her half-brother along to Uji as a mediator for "an encounter that might otherwise seem unreal" (1080; 6:356). Since Ukifune has become "one of the wanderers" (1073; 6:337) and Kaoru "like a sleepwalker" (1083; 6:364), they are both literally and metaphorically "adrift," searching for the past and for each other, recognizing through déjà vu that the fate of the one is mirrored in that of the other. A temporary depersonalization, like Keats's famous "negative capability," seems for Murasaki as for Proust to be a prerequisite for the recovery of the past through art. Inasmuch as Ukifune is one step further removed from society than the more outgoing, but nonetheless introverted, Kaoru, she may also be that much closer to the realm of the imagination, to the first intimations of creativity to which the chapter "At Writing Practice" [*Tenarai* 手習] testifies. The almost involuntary, spontaneous composition of poems<sup>43</sup> is now Ukifune's "chief pleasure" (1075; 6:342). In view of her previous restlessness and wanderings this new pleasure can hardly be overrated as a source of personal satisfaction and as the adoption of a socially acceptable role.

Like Marcel's difficult pilgrimage from love to art, Ukifune's movement also includes sexual complications, the experience of death, loneliness, depersonalization, and disillusionment with a society in decline. Her fate echoes that of previous generations, most notably Murasaki's. Like Marcel, although more intuitively so, she is receptive to seasonal impressions and sensual reminders of the past. What the famous memory-evoking madeleine in the tea is to Marcel, namely, the peace and contentedness of childhood, the "first spring shoots" (1075; 6:343) are to her. The bracken sprouts or *sawarabi* 初蕨 (cf. 872-3; 5:335-6) formerly sent to Uji, without her knowledge, in remembrance of the Eighth Prince, now evoke her memories of Kaoru and Niou, the lovers she found in lieu of the unkind father she never really knew. These harbingers of spring

<sup>43</sup> Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730-1801) defined the nature of *tenarai* as unpremeditated; see Thomas James Harper, "Motoori Norinaga's Criticism of the *Genji Monogatari*: A Study of the Background and Critical Content of his *Genji Monogatari Tama no Ogushi*" 玉の小櫛 [1793-96] (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Ph.D. diss., 1971), p. 175.

also become harbingers of the past as personified in the arrival of Kaoru.

Before Marcel comes to a creative halt at the Guermantes doorstep, he is a nautical wanderer: "I set off, trailing my shadow behind me, like a boat gliding across enchanted waters" (III, 709; III, 691). At a critical time in their relationship, Kaoru and Ukifune together contemplate the Uji river which is of mythic complexity, like Marcel's Sea. The river is not only a symbol of the passage of time (cf. 989; 6:136) but also of the quest for the past itself. When Kaoru repeatedly sits by the water to watch for the reflections of the images of his lost loves—first the Eighth Prince and Ōigimi (963; 6:78), then Ukifune (cf. 1077; 6:346)—it is nothing but his lonely narcissistic self that he can see. For the crowd fearful of the Buddhist Latter Days of the Law (*mappō*), the Uji river contains the time's apocalyptic aspects—imminent decline, death, lustration—and Ukifune experiences them all in her thwarted attempt at suicide in the river. Deep in his thoughts over Ukifune's disappearance, Kaoru blames himself for having fallen prey to the attractions that first drew him to Uji and for selfishly keeping Ukifune in his old romantic haunts:

here was the river, beckoning, and she had given in to it. If he had not left her in this wilderness, she might have found life difficult, but she would hardly have sought a "bottomless chasm." How sinister his ties had been with this river, how deep its hostility flowed! Drawn by the Eighth Prince's daughters, he had come the steep mountain road all these years, and now he could scarcely endure the sound of these two syllables "Uji." There had been bad omens, he now saw, from the start: in the "image," for instance, of which Nakanokimi had first spoken, an image to float down a river. (1025-6; 6:225)

With her crisis Ukifune has become associated with an image derived from the *nademono* 撫物 purification ceremony in which paper dolls are soiled and cast into the river.<sup>44</sup> Thus she has become vulnerable to her father's vengeance. After the exorcism of the Eighth Prince's evil spirit, she still occasionally considers her "soul [. . .] on driftwood" (1070; 6:330), especially when she feels under pressure from society to reveal her identity and once again to be like the rest of the world. But having escaped annihilation through her

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Shirane, *The Bridge of Dreams*, pp. 155-56.

miraculous extrication from the river, she has become an "extra-temporal being," like Marcel. She at last seems aloof from contemporary affairs and raises herself through her imagination like a bridge over troubled waters.

#### THE RECOVERY OF THE PAST

Of all of Murasaki's characters, Ukifune in particular proves that the search for human substitutes is illusory. On the other hand, the awareness of futility—a prerequisite for a more spiritual, artistic quest—grows out of precisely these frustrations with substitutes, and, in the heroine's peculiar case, the repetition of the trauma itself in her possession by the demonic spirit. The apparently cruel bewitchment is steeped in ambiguity,<sup>45</sup> for while in its nightmarishness it radically destroys illusions, it also forestalls suicide and opens up possibilities for a wholly imaginative, literary approach to the past.

With Ukifune, the *leitmotif* of excessive love receives a new variant. According to the established pattern, excessive love is highly conducive to psychological conflicts because its roots lie hidden in the trauma of parental death, deprivation, or neglect. Since Ukifune's mother views the Eighth Prince critically for his abandonment of her and their child—a typical fate of high ranking ladies-in-waiting and their children<sup>46</sup>—it is not surprising that Ukifune's stance toward her lost parent is more ambivalent than that of other characters' whole-hearted idolization. While in the past the shift from excessive love to substitute love correlated with a shift from a predominantly physical to a predominantly spiritual relationship, Ukifune experiences the two forms of love simultaneously, in her affairs with Niou and Kaoru.

Although both forms of love contain the same features of excess and substitution after traumatic loss, they are distinguishable on the basis of the usual sequence of events in which trauma is followed by a series of substitutions. As lost love is repeatedly replaced, the pro-

<sup>45</sup> The initial speculations of those who discover Ukifune attribute her bewitchment to a fox whose ambiguous nature was (and still is) a part of Japanese folklore; see Greg Gubler, "Kitsune: The Remarkable Japanese Fox," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 38 (1974): esp. 124–25.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Shirane, *The Bridge of Dreams*, p. 153.

tagonists' awareness of moving away from the original object of love increases and, together with the inevitability of the substitutes' shortcomings, causes a growing tendency toward the spiritualization of substitute love relationships. Substitutes can thus be categorized as *primary* (or predominantly physical) and *secondary* (or predominantly spiritual) substitutes. Yet unlike the slow transitions between primary and secondary substitutes made by other characters in the *Genji*, time and the repetitive process are dramatically condensed in Ukifune's double affair.

Guilt further complicates matters. Before Ukifune, the shift between primary and secondary substitution had occurred with varying degrees of guilt about betraying the memory of lost love. The burden was painful but bearable for the Kiritsubo Emperor and the Eighth Prince because they did not seek secondary substitutes until after the death of their primary substitutes. Genji's case is somewhat different. Not only does the specific taboo nature of his primary substitute love allow him to justify the search for a new substitute, but the tacit consent of the withdrawn Fujitsubo actually encourages him to do so, last but not least in the interest of keeping the illicit union a secret. Thus Genji's love for Murasaki functions to appease his conscience. While primary and secondary substitute love were chronologically separate for the Kiritsubo Emperor and the Eighth Prince, Genji's transition is less clear cut. As a result, Genji's substitution of Murasaki for Fujitsubo produces neither the continuing sadness of his father nor the self-loathing of his half-brother, but relief.

By contrast Ukifune's tortures originate in the simultaneity of her two affairs and the concomitant duplicity she cannot conceal—in the face of much gossip she must suspect that Niou and Kaoru know of each other. Her triangular love relationship with the two men turns the formerly allegorical conflict about lost love into a literal one. In Ukifune's double affair the mutually exclusive and incompatible primary and secondary forms of substitute love appear not sequentially, as with Genji and others, but simultaneously. Consequently, the dynamics of love are changed and the emotional entanglement increased to the extent that Ukifune wants to put an end to her life.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> To the present day variations on the conflicts inherent in triangular courtship and love

With Niou and Kaoru, Ukifune is in a double bind. Her love for Niou involves her in the betrayal of her benefactor and half-sister Nakanokimi. More severe still is the symbolic entanglement in the taboo of incest. At the Eastern Cottage, a place apart from the world and its moral code, Ukifune and Kaoru both pursue their symbolically incestuous needs. Here Ukifune's longing for a father seems at least momentarily satisfied in the image of the caring, reliable Kaoru, the former disciple of the Eighth Prince. Conversely, Kaoru's identification of Ukifune with his idolized substitute father allows him to suspend the image of a previous substitute (Ōigimi). Due to the near synchronization of the affairs Kaoru is not called upon to substitute for an intermediary object of excessive or primary love (Niou) but directly satisfies a parental fixation (Eighth Prince).

In his role as the Eighth Prince's former disciple, Kaoru demonstrates a spiritual rather than a merely physical resemblance to the male paragon. Kaoru's presence has the effect of a father figure and disturbs the triangular constellation; in Freudian terms, Kaoru represents a "return of the repressed."<sup>48</sup> At the Eastern Cottage Kaoru tempts Ukifune with incestuous desires. When Ukifune resolves to part ways with society and to throw herself into the Uji river, her death wish is intercepted by a supernatural event which is synonymous with an incestuous phantasy. The last Uji sister is possessed by the demonic spirit of her father,<sup>49</sup> who, according to

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affairs abound in Japanese literature. The topos is said to date back to the *Man'yōshū* 万葉集, first allegorically conceived in the rivalry of two mountains for a third in "The Three Hills" [I:13-15], later in more desperately human terms by Takahashi Mushimaro 高橋虫麻呂 (fl. ca. 730) and a later anonymous poet. In these tales about the Unai-otome 菟原処女 [cf. IX:1809-11; IX:1801-3] and the Cherry-Flower Maid [XVI:3786-87], the young women commit suicide in despair over their lovers' fierce rivalry and their own dilemma of choice. Cf. Robert H. Brower and Earl Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 92. For an extended prose-poem version of the legend, see episode 147 of *Tales of Yamato: A Tenth-Century Poem-Tale*, trans. Mildred M. Tahara (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1980), pp. 93-98; for other versions of the legend, see *ibid.*, pp. 186 ff.

<sup>48</sup> Orlando, *Toward a Freudian Theory of Literature*, *passim*. One aspect of Orlando's analysis of Racine's *Phèdre*, namely, Hippolyte's plight between the two women—Aricie and Phèdre—applies to some extent to the Uji chapters as well. Orlando sees Hippolyte's "pardonable transgression [with Aricie as] an alternative to the other, a means of escaping the other [viz., Phèdre]" (*ibid.*, p. 83). In both Racine and Murasaki the "pardonable transgression" (with Aricie and Niou) is subordinated to the treatment of the incest taboo.

<sup>49</sup> Carmen Blacker cites a contemporary case of alleged fox possession which the exorcist-medium analyzed as an incestuous phantasy: "It is not a fox who is troubling you. It is your

folkloristic stereotyping by some passers-by, comes to her in the shape of a fox.<sup>50</sup> The fox involves Ukifune not only in a confrontation with the past through the experience of symbolic death, but also constitutes a tragic cure for lost love. In symbolically becoming one with an animal, Ukifune furthermore reverts to an atavistic state helping to relieve her from social obligations, specifically, the pressure to decide whom to wed.<sup>51</sup> Paradoxically, the heroine's withdrawal through possession and trance is recognized by her society as a radical exposure to severe conflicts, and the exorcism that is provided by that society is believed to constitute part of the conflict-solving process.<sup>52</sup>

While Genji's love for his stepmother is depicted like any secretive love affair—apart from the specifically subversive consequences of incest and adultery—Ukifune's possession by her father's demonic spirit appears as a theriomorphic myth.<sup>53</sup> Differences

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dead father. He died in the house of his concubine and hence has been unable to achieve rest." Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1975), p. 239. Numerous other fox possessions in modern Japan, often "undeniably sexual in nature" and dating back to the ancient fox lore of China and Japan, are described in Winston Davis, *Dojo [道場]: Magic and Exorcism in Modern Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), p. 178, et passim.

<sup>50</sup> According to a well-known feature of Japanese folk mythology, "Foxes, dressed up as men, were believed to be in the habit of seducing and bewitching human beings." Donald Keene, ed., *Anthology of Japanese Literature: From the Earliest Era to the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (1955; rpt. New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 116, n. 8. Interestingly, Keene's footnote refers to the seduction scene between Genji and Yūgao, specifically, the lovers' half playful and half fearful allusion to foxes. This seduction not only occurs in the context of a triangular love relationship, the resultant tensions among Tō no Chūjō, Genji, and Yūgao also anticipate those of Ukifune, Niou, and Kaoru. Both women become possessed, and by citing foxes, the popular imagination manages to give a name to the mysterious. Yet familiarization with the supernatural does not relieve the witness(es) of the task of understanding the possessed "victim's" troubled psyche. The air of mystery that continues to hang over both tragic events, despite the expedient of folk myth, suggests the implication of human characters. Cf. Bergen, "Yūgao: A Case of Spirit Possession in *The Tale of Genji*," passim.

<sup>51</sup> For the role of animals in atavistic behavior, see Roger Shattuck, *The Forbidden Experiment: The Story of the Wild Boy of Aveyron* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1980), p. 181.

<sup>52</sup> In a useful definition of "Possession trance," Lenora Greenbaum states that "the phenomenon is accepted within the society as a trance induced by a spirit entering the person possessed, and not as an individual psychological aberration." Greenbaum, "Societal Correlates of Possession Trance in Sub-Saharan Africa," in Erika Bourguignon, ed., *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness and Social Change* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1973), pp. 42-43.

<sup>53</sup> Aside from numerous examples of Greek mythic stories, such as, e.g., Pasiphae and the bull, or Leda and the swan, theriomorphic relations are common in fairy tales and sagas all



in literary form reflect the differences in degree of taboo violation (son-stepmother as opposed to daughter-father) and also the protagonists' voluntary or involuntary participation in incest. What began with Genji and Fujitsubo as a conscious violation of the taboo, and was henceforth banned to the sphere of the unconscious, emerged in the Uji chapters in the struggle of the main characters to lift desires hidden in the unconscious to the level of the conscious.<sup>54</sup> Genji's delegation of consciously committed incest to the unconscious—the realm of dream—is reversed by Ukifune whose "Writing Practice" is an attempt to understand what possessed her and what led to her desire for self-destruction, questions which initiate a Proustian "recherche" of the past. In the Uji chapters the theme of incest is brought full circle, and a link to the past is established which appears as a reconciliation between the past, present, and future.

The mature Marcel believes that involuntary memory is the sole catalyst for recapturing the past. Ukifune arrives at an analogous belief after her possession and her trance are followed by her creative, spiritual link to the past, her construction of a Bridge of Dreams. Marcel's reflections bear a curious affinity to Ukifune's response to her possession and its aftermath:

I feel that there is much to be said for the Celtic belief that the souls of those whom we have lost are held captive in some inferior being, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, and thus affectively lost to us until the day (which to many never comes) when we happen to pass by the tree or to obtain possession of the object which forms their prison. Then they start and tremble, they call us by our name, and as soon as we have recognised their voice the spell is broken. Delivered by us, they have overcome death and return to share our life.

And so it is with our own past. (I, 47; I, 44)

The character constellation at the end of *The Tale of Genji* is more substantial in terms of the delineation of personalities than that of *A*

over the world. Otto Rank's extensive investigations into this subject furthermore identify this form of sexual deviance as incest in literary disguise. Cf. Rank, *Das Inzest-Motiv in Dichtung und Sage: Grundzüge einer Psychologie des dichterischen Schaffens*, 2nd rev. ed. (Leipzig/Wien: Franz Deuticke, 1926), pp. 337–86, esp. 364–67.

<sup>54</sup> In his attempt to explain the differences between the various sections of the *Genji monogatari*, Earl Miner distinguishes the Uji chapters by a similar process of cognitive reversal when he refers to the "etherealizing of Genji's world." Miner, "Some Thematic and Structural Features of the *Genji Monogatari*," *MN* 24 (1969): 18.

*la recherche du temps perdu*. The Uji chapters show Kaoru painfully carrying the burden of the past. In spite of the fact that he is present only as a representative of the last of three generations, his concerns span the whole of the *Genji*. Through his quest for Genji (his fictional father), Kashiwagi (his real father), and the Eighth Prince (his chosen father), Kaoru is intricately woven into the total fabric of Murasaki's dramatization of three generations.

Regardless of the fact that secondary substitutes are usually further removed in time, genealogy, or some other factor from the original object of love than the excessively loved primary substitute, the protagonists' encounter with them enhances the awareness of repetitious events, especially when the trauma itself is evoked. Then secondary substitutes function as mediate links to the past. Not surprisingly, therefore, more emphasis is placed on the depiction of secondary substitutes and their psychological complexities and significance than on the primary substitute of excessive love itself. Thus, Murasaki's problems with Genji are given greater attention than those of Fujitsubo; for Kaoru, the Uji sisters, especially Ukifune, gain priority over the Eighth Prince; and for Ukifune, Kaoru outlasts Niou. Albertine, who is Marcel's chief substitute, poses so many riddles for the hero that he feels compelled to probe further and further into the mysteries of the past.

While by sheer physical intensity primary substitute love compensates more or less successfully for traumatic loss, secondary substitute love is inevitably unsuccessful because it cannot replace both cause (original loss) and effect (excessive primary substitute love). The emotional failure of the second type of love has important psychological results. In the primary substitution, pretraumatic (or archetypal) harmony is reconstituted, at least as an illusion. In the secondary substitution, however, the traumatic incident itself—the parent's sudden inaccessibility—is repeated. From a sense of confusion and frustration the needy tend to exchange roles with the needed. The victim twice deprived, of archetypal and of primary love, now becomes the victimizer. Assuming the role of the inaccessible lover, he simultaneously seeks and rejects the substitute.

Some secondary love relationships, as, e.g., Kaoru-Ukifune or Marcel-Albertine, are further complicated because the lovers' roles are interchangeable to the extent that the fate of the one mirrors that

of the other. Emotional fulfillment is hopelessly impossible because each seeks in the other what the other, because of social status or sexual orientation, cannot possibly provide. Mutual inaccessibility guarantees "frustration" in the very love relationship that, conventionally, provides reciprocal emotional fulfillment. Genji and Murasaki experience a milder version of the conflict; they are troubled because they have no children of their own. But the intensity of the Kaoru-Ukifune and Marcel-Albertine relationships draws the lovers towards self-destruction.

Sometimes self-destruction actually occurs. In the *Genji*, Ōigimi seeks death by starvation. Her de facto suicide foreshadows Ukifune's death wish. The older and the younger sisters, unlike the middle one, remain in the Prince's sphere of influence. Since Nakanokimi is protected by her mother's will, she suffers comparatively little from having disobeyed her father by leaving Uji to marry the unreliable Niou. Ironically, it is Ōigimi, the most obedient of the daughters, who rejects—as suitor—the guardian of her father's choice and dies.<sup>55</sup> Her unwillingness to accept another (Kaoru) as substitute (for her beloved father), combined with her refusal to serve (Kaoru) as substitute (for the lost parent), lead to a novel variant on the idea of substitution: as she can neither serve as, nor accept another as, a substitute, she conceives of offering a substitute *for herself*. The traditional search for a substitute is radically replaced by the substitution of self. Yet Ōigimi's strategy is, ironically, obstructed by those for whose benefit it is apparently designed—Kaoru and Nakanokimi believe Ōigimi to be irreplaceable.<sup>56</sup> Ōigimi's categorical refusal to conform to the established pattern of substitution contributes to her sense of guilt over the betrayal of Nakanokimi and the rejection of Kaoru.

Her despair mounts when she recognizes that the failure of her strategy also threatens her bond with the Eighth Prince. She finds

<sup>55</sup> As one critic has suggestively hinted: "As long as Kaoru behaves as a soulful *castrato*, he appeals to Ōigimi as no other man besides her father." Field, *The Splendor of Longing*, p. 237.

<sup>56</sup> The idea of Ōigimi's new twist on the pattern of substitution was inspired by Hirota Osamu 廣田収, "*Genji monogatari ni okeru 'yukari' kara tasha no hakken e*," *Chūko bungaku* 20 (October 1978): 28–38. Hirota points out that the old concept of substitution begins to erode with Murasaki's crisis over the Third Princess. Murasaki's desire to renounce the world and her confrontation with death provide the seed for the development of the irreplaceable individual in the Uji chapters. Cf. Hirota, *ibid.*, pp. 32, 34–35.

herself incapable of dreaming of her father as one way of remaining attached to him.<sup>57</sup> Ōigimi's romantic *Liebestod* is the symbolically incestuous variant of Kashiwagi's self-starvation. Furthermore, her straightforward fixation may explain why she is never possessed and why her unsuccessful attempt to achieve consolation in dreams leads her to resort to a strategy directly aimed at following her possessive father into death.<sup>58</sup> Unlike Ōigimi, who idolizes her father much as he idolized her (as well as her younger sister), Ukifune alone confronts the dark side of the Eighth Prince in spirit possession.<sup>59</sup> Her unhappiness brings to the fore the malevolent spirit of her dead father.<sup>60</sup> When the demon is exorcized, suicidal despair is revealed to have invited destructive forces.<sup>61</sup> In the code

<sup>57</sup> Fujimura Kiyoshi 藤村潔 interprets Ōigimi's inability to dream of her father as her lack of a bad conscience, while in Nakanokimi's case the Eighth Prince is seen as a source of anxiety. See Fujimura, "Hachi no miya no yuigon," *KGMS* 8:116-17. To put the matter differently, it is Ōigimi who actively desires to dream of her father, but cannot [*usetamaite nochi, ika de yume ni mo mitatematsuramu to omou o, sara ni koso mitatematsurane*, *NKBZ* 5:302, cf. also 5:301]. On the other hand, Nakanokimi, being less obsessed, dreams of him spontaneously.

<sup>58</sup> Ōigimi begins to starve herself under increasing pressure for marriage, growing skepticism about men, and fear of soiling the family name—in her own nutshell: "*nao waga dani, saru mono omoi ni shizumazu, tsumi nado ito fukaranu saki ni, ika de naku nari namu*" [*NKBZ* 5:290]. However, as Field has hinted, Ōigimi's frustrations over Nakanokimi's marriage and her own grim prospects for life in Uji are not enough to explain the "extravagant willfulness of her departure." *The Splendor of Longing*, p. 251.

<sup>59</sup> Fujii Sadakazu, who sees Ukifune as Ōigimi's substitute or *katashiro* 形代 until her rebirth after the possession scene, claims that it is, in fact, the *mono no ke* that rescues her from suicide and holds that, with the energy derived from the supernatural, Ukifune first arranges to leave the world to become a nun (*shukkesha* 出家者) and then reconfirms her religious vows (*saishukke* 再出家) intending to save Kaoru. "Tsuku [憑く] bungaku: *Genji monogatari* ron no tame ni," *Bungaku* (Nov. 1982): 100-16, esp. 109-10, 112-14.

<sup>60</sup> In contrast to Ōigimi, Ukifune is possessed by the spirit of the Eighth Prince, but she does not die. Although critics of the *Genji* have attempted to identify all other major possessing spirits in the novel, they have been curiously reluctant to identify Ukifune's, possibly because of the Eighth Prince's apparent sacrosanctity. Their reluctance is all the more baffling, since Ōigimi has been identified as the girl whose death Ukifune's possessing spirit refers to. Cf. Earl Miner, "The Heroine: Identity, Recurrence, Destiny," in *Ukifune: Love in The Tale of Genji*, ed. Andrew Pekarik (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 69. Furthermore, Ukifune's possessing spirit is a former monk with a grudge against the world (like the Eighth Prince), and the haunted girls are of the house that is identified as that of the Eighth Prince. Cf. *NKBZ* 6:283, n. 19, n. 20 and *Genji monogatari hyōshaku*, ed. Tamagami Takuya 玉上琢彌, 12 vols. (Kadokawa shoten, 1964-68), 12:375-76. It may be interesting to note the connection between Ukifune's earlier visit to Hasedera in memory of her father (see my note 30), the divine intervention of the Hatsuse Kannon in the possession, and the heroine's subsequent refusal to visit Hasedera [see Shirane, *The Bridge of Dreams*, p. 198].

<sup>61</sup> Anthropologists and psychologists have linked incestuous to suicidal dispositions, see

language of the supernatural the demonic Eighth Prince confesses his fatally possessive claim on his daughters, two of whom he victimized, through indoctrination [Ōigimi] and possession [Ukifune]:

“You think it is this I have come for?” it [the spirit] shouted. “No, no. I was once a monk myself, and I obeyed all the rules; but I took away a grudge that kept me tied to the world, and I wandered here and I wandered there, and found a house full of beautiful girls. One of them died, and this one wanted to die too. She said so, every day and every night. I saw my chance and took hold of her one dark night when she was alone. But Our Lady of Hatsuse was on her side through it all, and now I have lost out to His Reverence. I shall leave you.” (1050; 6:283)

At the end of the *Genji* and the *Recherche*, Ukifune and Marcel, having been touched by death, are preoccupied with the imaginary realm of the Bridge of Dreams. In Greek mythology, Acheron is the river of no return; the Uji river and the Venetian labyrinth of waterways<sup>62</sup> carry a similar meaning. Mythic heroes require artful cunning to escape from the Underworld or from the Minotaur's Labyrinth; Ukifune and Marcel require both artfulness and art.

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Herbert Maisch, *Inzest* (1968; rpt. Hamburg: Rowohlt, n. d.), p. 26 [*Incest*, trans. Colin Bearne (New York: Stein and Day, 1972)].

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Anne-Lisa Amadou, “The Theme of Water in *A la recherche du temps perdu*,” *Modern Language Review* 72.2 (1977): 310–21. Amadou sees in Venice “a rare example in Proust of water as a symbol of destruction” (p. 319).



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# Beautiful Boys in Nō Drama: The Idealization of Homoerotic Desire

William MacDuff

*William MacDuff examines the nō theatre of Japan in order to explore what he describes as homoerotic elements in this form's playtexts. He discusses the background of same-sex attachments in medieval Japan and reflects on the implications of such relationships for our understanding of the nō.*

*William MacDuff is a graduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles.*

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Japanese theatrical performances were often variety-type shows that relied heavily on erotic spectacle. Because the powerful male patrons who supported the theatre were known to be attracted to youths of both sexes, such displays generally featured beautiful boys and adolescent men as well as young women. The program of a *kusemai* troupe shows experienced adult male performers pushed to the background in favor of apparently more enticing teenage boys and girls (Araki 1964, 68). A *dengaku* performance described in 1349 began with a parade of eight beautiful children and eight "handsome" young priests, their teeth blackened and their faces painted to enhance their sexual allure (O'Neill 1958, 76). Like *kabuki* actors of a later period, *sarugaku* actors were associated in the public mind with male prostitution and frequently sold sexual services to supplement their income (Watanabe 1989, 79). And in about 1375, it was the physical beauty of the young Zeami (as well as the artistry of his father) that inspired the shogun Yoshimitsu to bring the Kanze troupe to his court—and Zeami to his bed—and set the stage for the development of classical *nō* drama.

It is generally agreed that the need to accommodate the aesthetic taste of the Muromachi aristocracy was a primary factor in the maturation of the *nō* and the shift of Zeami's interest from realism to the more complex beauty of *yūgen*.<sup>1</sup> That same aristocracy's sexual taste for boys and young men is equally clear—not only from the erotic spectacles that remained popular while *yūgen nō* developed, but from the historical record. Each shogun during Zeami's lifetime had one or

more well-known male lovers. If we are to believe the court gossip of the period, such attachments contributed at least in part to Zeami's eventual banishment and even the outbreak of the Onin civil war (Watanabe and Iwata, 1989, 48–51).<sup>2</sup>

Although the medieval concept of *yūgen* referred in its simplest form to the aesthetic and sensual charms of beautiful boys, critical accounts of *nō* texts rarely identify homoerotic elements in the plays themselves, perhaps in the belief that the overtly sexual elements of *sarugaku* were discarded as the *nō* became increasingly solemn and spiritual.<sup>3</sup> It is true that *yūgen nō* prizes spirit and emotion over mere displays of pretty flesh; but Japanese thought during the middle ages understood male homoerotic desire to be a sacred force as well as a physical one. The ideal of male same-sex attraction as a source of spiritual revelation and a means by which lovers may be eternally united can be found in many of the *nō* texts that survive, including those available in English translations.

As recent scholarship has demonstrated, the history of Japanese constructions of sexuality is no less varied than that of the West.<sup>4</sup> In very general terms, however, it can be said that until the Meiji reforms of the nineteenth century, the Japanese male was presumed to be what we might call “bisexual” and could engage in homosexual relations under certain conditions without fear of censure and without being considered “abnormal.” But those relations were expected to take place between partners of different ages—that is, between a man and a boy. (Same-sex relations between adult males or between females are much less frequently mentioned in the surviving literature.)

The medieval boy, then, might well have his first sexual experiences with grown men; later, when he became an adult, he might take his turn as the elder partner in such liaisons. In any event, he was expected eventually to marry a woman and produce offspring, unless he was a priest in one of the Buddhist sects that prohibited contact with females. Probably because such priests were forbidden heterosexual outlets, medieval art and literature often associated male same-sex relationships with certain clerical orders, such as those of the great temple complexes on Mounts Kōya and Hiei. Noblemen sent their sons, aged roughly from seven to fourteen, to be educated at these monasteries, and it was common knowledge that priests there often fell in love with their young acolytes, or *chigo* (Childs 1980, 127). Numerous sources detail the affairs between priests and young aristocrats; by the end of the fifteenth century, such unions had inspired a number of popular stories, now called the *chigo monogatari*.

Although any desire of the flesh threatened a priest's release from worldly attachments, boys may have seemed less dangerous sex-



ual objects than women. While the youth of a sexual partner invoked no special moral injunction, females were held to be lower on the reincarnational cycle and thus liable to “pollute” a priest who slept with them.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the love of boys found religious justification in Buddhist myths of divine children and child bodhisattvas (who delay their passage to nirvana in order to enlighten others) and perhaps even in native traditions which invoke child gods to ensure a good harvest.<sup>6</sup> In one fourteenth-century tale, the androgynous deity Kannon is incarnated as a beautiful acolyte; the boy serves and sleeps with a monk for three years and then dies. As the heartbroken monk performs the final rites over the boy’s body, Kannon’s true self is revealed and the monk’s everlasting devotion to the deity is secured (Guth 1987, 16–18).

In several of the *chigo monogatari*, the boy is not an actual god, but his innate purity and untimely death are still the means of his lover’s ultimate salvation (Childs 1980, 128). When his protégé dies, the mentor recognizes that while the affections of a boy are comforting, the very transience of boyish beauty, a beauty often compared to the fragile cherry blossom, demonstrates the impermanence of earthly attachments.<sup>7</sup> The ideal *chigo*, then, was part aristocrat (as evidenced, in most accounts, by his skill with poetry and musical instruments) and part deity (as shown by his knowledge of the sutras and his ethereal beauty). The adult lover of such a boy owed him religious instruction and moral guidance in return for the romantic and spiritual rewards he received from their friendship.

The physically alluring and spiritually exemplary *chigo* is a common character in *nō* drama, as well, and popular knowledge of the special devotion of priests to their charges provided medieval playwrights with occasional content for their narratives and a means to satisfy their audiences’ taste for homoerotic exhibitions. The *nō* play *Tanikō* deals with an ascetic sect whose religious traditions differ somewhat from those of the monasteries, but in its narrative structure, and in the extraordinary feeling a priest displays for his acolyte, the drama resembles the *chigo monogatari*.<sup>8</sup>

*Tanikō* begins when a religious leader is about to embark on a pilgrimage: he visits his young protégé to say goodbye, but the boy begs to be taken on the arduous journey in order to pray for his sick mother. The priest consents and the first part of the play details the tender parting of mother and child. Arthur Waley, for one, associates *Tanikō* with another drama that celebrates filial piety, but while the devotion of the son is a key element in the play—and an opportunity for a *kokata*, or child actor, to display his charms—the theme of filial piety is inadequate to explain the attention paid to the relationship between master and disciple throughout the rest of the play. The text

soon dispenses with the mother (who is the *shite* in some versions of the play) and focuses instead on the spiritual quandary of the religious leader portrayed by the *waki*.

As the play continues, the priest and acolyte make a pilgrimage up a mountainside. The boy himself soon falls ill, however, and fellow pilgrims demand that he be thrown off a cliff so his disease will not pollute the ritual. The boy's master is devastated: he invokes the vows he and the boy have sworn to one another and even lies about the illness in a futile attempt to save his protégé. The priest's attachment to the world of desire is dramatized by this willingness to violate the rules of the sect. That the priest's feelings are also paternal should not blind us to the erotic implications this story must have had to an audience familiar with popular tales of the love of clergy for their *chigo*.

For as in some of the *chigo monogatari*, the priest's devotion to his charge is not merely a sign of his ties to this world but also a device by which the world of spirit is made manifest. In *Tanikō*, after the boy is sacrificed, the grief of his mentor is so moving the pilgrims pray together until they invoke the ghost of their order's founder, who, in a miraculous climax, proclaims the benevolence of Buddha and calls up a demon to resurrect the dead boy. The play thus dramatizes the apparent paradox of the tales: although his attachment to a *chigo* may tend to bind a priest to the temporal realm, the sacred component of that love (and the example of a boyish beauty both pure and fragile) constitutes an expedient means (or *hōben*) to eventually unite the lover with the divine. *Tanikō* may well represent a hybrid of familial piety plays with the stories of love among the clergy. Certainly its peculiar structure seems less so in the context of the popular literature of the middle ages.

Although the perishable nature of boyish beauty remains a common theme, other *nō* plays utilize homoerotic elements in a less obviously didactic manner. The warrior play *Tsunemasa* (Waley 1957, 81–87),<sup>9</sup> for example, is a rather straightforward elegy to a former *chigo*; it is based on an account in the epic *Heike monogatari* in which the Taira prince, Tsunemasa, refuses to abandon the fallen capital without first visiting his former mentor, the abbot of Ninna-ji temple (Anonymous 1975, 441–443). Tsunemasa spent the ages of eight to thirteen there, during which time he rarely left the abbot's side; in return, the abbot so favored Tsunemasa above all others that he gave the boy a centuries-old Chinese *biwa* which had been designated an imperial treasure. The parting of mentor and protégé is highly romanticized in the tale. Tsunemasa at last breaks away with an impassioned promise to the abbot: "Never will I cease to desire / To remain here by your side" (p. 442).

The *nō* version is set sometime after Tsunemasa's death in battle; a young priest sent to pray for Tsunemasa's soul predicts the fallen warrior and his mentor will surely be united after death.<sup>10</sup> During the prayers, the ghost of Tsunemasa appears: true to his vow of eternal devotion, he has returned to earth, compelled by the longing "to look again, through the wall of death, on one he loved" (Waley 1957, 83). Though this reunion is denied him, the chorus recounts his virtues as a *chigo* and Tsunemasa is allowed to play his lute one last time. If an epiphany is effected by Tsunemasa's demise, it takes place only in the mind of the viewer. The purpose of this simple play is not so much to teach dogma as to meditate on the lost beauty of a famous boy and the *yūgen* of a male love that survives even a violent death.

Although the pure and ethereal *chigo* remained a cultural and religious icon for centuries to come, by Zeami's time he was already being replaced in the popular imagination by another type of ideal boy: the warrior's companion, or *wakashu*. Warriors were understood to prefer lovers somewhat older—12 to 18—and somewhat hardier. Like the *chigo*, the *wakashu* was valued for his devotion, artistic accomplishments, and beauty, but the ideal *wakashu* was also expected to be strong and brave and at least a willing student of the martial arts (Watanabe and Iwata, 1989, 48, 110).

As political power shifted to the samurai class beginning in the thirteenth century, the *wakashu* gradually replaced the *chigo* in cultural representations of male love as a martial model of homosexuality emerged that has been compared to those of ancient Greece and Germany. (In actual practice during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the words *chigo* and *wakashu* were sometimes used interchangeably or even hyphenated and used together. Here I follow the practice of others and use the terms to distinguish between the stereotypical protégés of priest and samurai, respectively.) Like same-sex relationships among the clergy, those of the samurai retained a pedagogical element: in return for his *giri* (or "sense of obligation") to his lover, the *wakashu* had the right to expect "social backing and a model of manliness" (Schalow 1990, 123). The young man's participation in such a relationship was called *shudō*, the "Way of Youth," or the means by which he might grow to mature self-awareness (Watanabe and Iwata, 1989, 109). For both partners, the resulting bond was understood to be spiritual and long lasting. Although in theory the *wakashu* was no longer an appropriate sexual partner once he reached adulthood, many accounts find male lovers swearing to remain committed friends beyond their years of sexual involvement and even into future lives.

The popular boy-hero of *nō* drama, Ushiwaka, seems a sort of transitional figure representing this shift in erotic tastes. Like Tsune-

masa, Ushiwaka is the subject of epics that note his androgynous beauty as a *chigo*, his devotion to his mentor, and his skill with the flute (Anonymous 1966, 72–86), but accounts of Ushiwaka's boyhood also emphasize his supernatural talent for the martial arts. In *nō* plays based on Ushiwaka tales, an encounter with the boy leads one character, the priest-warrior Benkei, to swear a “three-lives bond” with the boy (Waley 1957, 115–120) and inspires another, the bandit Kumasaka, to spiritual salvation (pp. 91–101). Like those who meet the divine boys of earlier legends, Benkei and Kumasaka find in Ushiwaka the expedient means for radical transformation. If one is reluctant to impose phallic significance on Ushiwaka's flute and sword—or to acknowledge the erotic component of combat with the beautiful boy—the text of the Kumasaka play specifically relates Ushiwaka's swordplay to the arrows of the God of Love (p. 95).

If we have no way of knowing how many individuals actually participated in homosexual relationships, it is at least clear that *shudō* was a prominent cultural concern among the samurai class of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—and a well-known concept to Zeami and his audience when he composed the warrior play *Atsumori* (Yasuda 1989, 229–252).<sup>11</sup> Perhaps no other play better demonstrates the idealization of homoerotic sentiment in the Muromachi period, even though the man and boy with whom the text is concerned are not physical lovers but deadly enemies.

Taira no Atsumori is Tsunemasa's younger brother, and the *Heike monogatari* recounts in some detail how the teenaged prince falls to an enemy warrior in battle (Anonymous 1975, 561–563). His opponent, Kumagae no Jirō Naozane, is at first struck by the youth's beauty and innocence and compares Atsumori favorably to his own son. Kumagae refuses to attack, but the arrival of witnesses forces him to end Atsumori's life. Discovering a flute on the dead body, Kumagae is moved by the gentility of his victim and, in a sudden epiphany recalling other encounters with beautiful boys, he is inspired to “pursue the way to Buddha” (p. 563).

Few details of the original survive in Zeami's text, and Donald Keene, for one, finds the result devoid of “pathos or drama” (Keene 1973, 50). But the narrative details Zeami omits simply emphasize those that remain. The play is set several years after the fatal encounter: a chastened Kumagae has become a priest (taking the name Ren-sei) and has devoted his life to praying for his victim's soul. That Zeami's audience would have understood this spiritual awakening to be a product of homoerotic sentiment seems probable: not only does it echo the tradition of conversions inspired by beautiful boys, but by Zeami's day Kumagae's transformation had already been adopted as a narra-

tive device in one of the best-known *chigo monogatari* (Childs 1980, 130 n.14).

Kumagae's contrition need not be attributed only to his new-found understanding of Buddhist truths, however; it is also consistent with the ideal of male love among the samurai. When they met upon the battlefield, his "natural" inclinations (*ninjō*) toward a youth such as Atsumori—as those inclinations were understood during the middle ages—would have been sensual, affectionate, and pedagogical, even though class differences might have precluded a physical love affair between them. It was Kumagae's *giri* to his clan that contravened his *ninjō* and required him to cut the boy down.<sup>12</sup> Of course, Kumagae is contrite: when he laid down his sword after the battle, he not only reflected religious precedence, he paid homage to the beauty he had been made to destroy. Still, though Kumagae incites the dramatic action by returning to the scene of battle, the primary focus of the play is on the role taken by the *shite*, that of Atsumori himself. And Atsumori was a well-known and idealized *wakashu* in Japanese medieval culture, as evidenced by the attention paid to his beauty in a fifteenth-century *kōwaka* ballad and even a reference, as late as the 1600s, in Ihara Saikaku's *The Great Mirror of Male Love* (1990, 62).<sup>13</sup>

Zeami is writing for the theatre, of course, and he uses performance elements to emphasize the youth's beauty. Atsumori appears in the first part of the play as a young reaper, perhaps recalling the divine sons of *kami* so central to native harvest rituals. In one sense this manifestation is a disguise (since the dead Atsumori is already a ghost); but in performance, the appearance as a reaper allows the actor playing the part to go unmasked (Yasuda 1989, 230) and, presumably, to display his own physical attractiveness. Not surprisingly, Zeami insists in one critical treatise that aging actors must not attempt this role (Quinn 1993, 84).

Music is also specifically employed to demonstrate the youth's appeal. As we might expect, given the importance of Atsumori's flute in the original tale, the young reaper displays his prowess on that instrument. But the use of the flute is also a common signifier of beautiful boys, as in the Ushiwaka and *chigo* tales. Kumagae, at least, is obviously charmed and attracted by the musical display. Later in the play, where the heroes of other warrior plays dance the quick *kakeri* dance, Zeami gives Atsumori the *chū no mai* commonly reserved for female roles (Yasuda 1989, 230). The sight of a warrior doing a woman's dance affords the character a refined, almost feminine, beauty that emphasizes his allure.<sup>14</sup>

What ensues, then, is lacking neither in pathos nor in dramatic action; it is even dramatic in the Aristotelian sense that a breach is

resolved through the intentional actions of these agents. Through the piety born of his regret, Kumagae quiets the angry ghost of Atsumori: as a man of the spirit, Kumagae becomes the mentor he was unable to be as a man of the sword. Atsumori, who under other circumstances might have expected more tender consideration from his opponent and who complains bitterly that he is friendless (p. 235), achieves the comfort of a companion. The potential mentor and protégé are reconciled, to be reborn together on one lotus seat in paradise (p. 252).<sup>15</sup> Thus the text achieves the desired *yūgen* of mature *nō* by recognizing the sublimity of a bond formed despite the terrible fragility of Atsumori's temporal beauty and the violence necessitated by the fractures of civil war. That the ultimate union is spiritual does not negate the erotic implications; like some of the *chigo monogatari*, the play celebrates homoerotic sentiment as an expedient means by which transcendent states (Kumagae's piety, Atsumori's peace) are achieved.

We would not expect a modern viewer to fully understand or appreciate *nō* drama without some awareness of the religious, political, and economic contexts in which that drama was created. For at least some of the plays, a knowledge of medieval constructions of male sexuality is no less essential. It seems doubtful that further scholarship will uncover medieval persons or dramatic characters who can be readily equated with modern gay men, for homosexual desires were not considered defining elements of a unique personal identity nor matters of interest to a mere minority. By the same token, however, scholars should not assume the male characters of Muromachi literature are exclusively "heterosexual" whenever they fail to declare themselves "queer." Rather, artists and audiences of the period understood same-sex attraction to be a common occurrence between "normal" boys and men and *shudō* to be a popular ideal. It seems likely they would have recognized the sexual implications of relationships such as that between Kumagae and Atsumori—particularly when those ties inspired spiritual transformations—for Japanese medieval thinking saw homoerotic desire as not just a matter of what men did with their genitalia, but of where they invested their hearts and even their souls.

## NOTES

1. For one such discussion see Hare (1986, 29–30, 300) who defines *yūgen* as "elegant and mysterious beauty" with "a profundity not apparent on the surface."

2. The point is not whether these reports were accurate, of course, but that the importance attributed to the same-sex attachments of the ruling class reveals popular understanding of the interests of the powerful.

3. Arthur Waley seems to imply as much in the introduction to his well-known collection of *nō* translations. There he contrasts the “indecent” of early *sarugaku* with the “serious dramatic performance” of mid-fourteenth-century *nō* (Waley 1957, 15–18).

4. As numerous commentators acknowledge, modern taxonomies of gender and sexuality are woefully inexact when used to describe premodern and non-European identities, desires, and behavior. (See Pflugfelder 1992 for a [more extensive] discussion of the problem.) To take only one example, there can be no “bisexuality” in a culture lacking a concept of “homosexual” and “heterosexual” polarities. Still, some sort of language must be employed, and though the medieval period may not have distinguished male same-sex and opposite-sex attractions as *physical* forces, it did sometimes distinguish these desires as spiritual attachments, as the surviving literature suggests. In general, then, I use “homoerotic” and “same-sex” as adjectives because these words have no equivalent noun forms to suggest identities based on sexual desire; I use “homosexual” to denote behavior, not a category of person.

5. Females were subject to the “Five Obstacles” and “Three Subjugations” and generally had to be reincarnated at least once more (as a male) before they could attain buddhahood (Childs 1991, 62, 106). This is not to suggest that a cleric of the middle ages could rely on absolute scriptural preference for male same-sex behavior; other texts cautioned against undue attachments to beautiful boys (p. 47). Another writer suggests that priests found their relations with *chigo* a reasonable compromise between Tantric Buddhist doctrines celebrating the holiness of the sex act and monastic prohibitions against contact with females (Watanabe and Iwata, 1989, 45–46).

6. See Guth (1987, 20–22) for a discussion of such “children of *kami*.”

7. See, for example, the story *Aki no Yō no Nagamonogatari* (A Long Tale for an Autumn Night), which dates from at least 1377; Margaret Childs’ translation of this tale is included in her discussion of the *chigo monogatari* (Childs 1980, 132–151).

8. *Tanikō* has been translated by Royall Tyler as “The Valley Rite” (Keene and Tyler 1970, 315–331). Arthur Waley provides a partial translation in his earlier collection (Waley 1957, 229–235). Although Waley attributes the original play to Zeami’s son-in-law, Zenchiku Ujinobu (1414–1499?), Tyler indicates the authorship is unknown.

9. Following tradition, Waley attributes the original text to Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1444), but Zeami does not claim the play in his own writings.

10. Either Waley relied on a Japanese text that had been altered since the Muromachi period or the translator erred: he identifies Tsunemasa’s mentor as the emperor rather than the imperial abbot. The *Heike monogatari* is unequivocal on the subject and Waley himself knew that the emperor at the time of Tsunemasa’s death was a mere infant (Waley 1957, 63). Moreover, the *biwa* given to Tsunemasa for his devotion was banished from court and exiled to Ninna-ji more than a century earlier; the tale devotes an entire chapter to

recounting the history of the instrument (Anonymous 1975, 444–45). The play is otherwise strictly faithful to the details of the epic and quotes directly from Tsunemasa's farewell to the abbot: a medieval audience would not have mistaken the object of the boy's affections.

11. Ijiri Chusuke's *The Essence of the Jakudo* (1482) identifies *shudō* as a popular and time-honored custom. During the same period, the poet Sogi took it upon himself to codify the ideal qualities of the *chigo* and *wakashu* (Watanabe and Iwata, 1989, 109–110), suggesting that there was a ready audience for such material.

12. James T. Araki translates and analyzes a *kōwaka* version of the same story. In this ballad (first transcribed in the sixteenth century but dating from sometime earlier), Kumagae is so taken by the sight of Atsumori that he loses his martial skill and is about to offer the boy "protection and care" when the arrival of other warriors reminds Kumagae of his clan obligations (Araki 1964, 166).

13. Araki notes that the *kōwaka* description of Atsumori (as seen through Kumagae's eyes) is unusually extended but devoid of "individualizing detail" (Araki 1964, 113). The result is to make of Atsumori an archetype of the perfect *wakashu*, rather than a carefully delineated character.

14. Yasuda's explanation for the *chū no mai* is different from mine, but he believes the dance reflects the playwright's original intent and acknowledges that it is unusual for this type of *nō* play.

15. This detail is also present in the *kōwaka* version (Araki 1964, 167) and is identified as the intended goal of Kumagae's prayers for Atsumori's soul.

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# Rethinking *Shunga*: The Interpretation of Sexual Imagery of the Edo Period

PAUL BERRY  
KANSAI GAIDAI UNIVERSITY

As the publication of uncensored reproductions of sexually explicit Ukiyo-e prints and paintings has gradually become commonplace in Japan since the mid-1980s, a number of popular books devoted to this category, so-called *shunga* ("spring pictures"), have emerged. The availability of these materials, including facsimile editions of entire woodblock books with their texts set into modern typeface, has prompted an array of scholarly explorations of this newly accessible area of Edo-period culture. During the 1990s scholarly symposiums,<sup>1</sup> articles, and books began to consider *shunga* from sociological, sexological, artistic, and other perspectives. Among these, Timon Screech's *Sex and the Floating World* may have been the first English-language book-length examination of *shunga* aimed at setting "erotic images properly into their social context" (p. 9).<sup>2</sup> *Sex and the Floating World* was preceded a year earlier by a Japanese version of the text, *Shunga: Katate de Yomu Edo no E (Shunga: Edo Images Read with One Hand)*. Since the publication of these twin volumes, a worldwide discussion has ensued over their content and approach. Paul Schalow hailed the work: "Screech's study takes a rigorously historical perspective on the images it addresses and situates each one carefully in its extraordinarily complex cultural setting," and "*Sex and the Floating World* is a tour de force, unequalled by anything else I have encountered on *shunga* in the theoretical sophistication of the questions it poses."<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Allen Hockley's more critical assessment asserts that "[Screech's] intention to recontextualize *shunga* is prefaced by what is in fact an act of decontextualization," adding that "playing fast and loose with the evidence in this manner is relatively common in the more poorly conceived of visual culture studies."<sup>4</sup> Likewise, mixed reactions to the Japanese version of the text have continued to appear, most recently in the two-volume collection of essays by Shirakura Yoshihiko et al., *Ukiyoe Shunga o Yomu*, published late in 2000. As these discussions demonstrate, the issues and approaches raised by Screech are of ongoing significance. An analysis of some aspects of Screech's work in the larger context of current publications on gender, sexual practices, and Edo culture, allows us to explore a number of the controversial aspects of these works and to rethink some of the problems involved in the interpretation of *shunga*.

Screech organized the chapters of *Sex and the Floating World* around intriguing themes, including "Erotic Images,

Pornography, *Shunga* and Their Use," "Bodies, Boundaries, Pictures," and "The Scopic Regimes of *Shunga*." These titles and further subheadings, such as "The Problem of Manhood" (p. 79), "Sexuality and Difference" (p. 88), "The Historical Third Person" (p. 197), reveal the author's ambitions to bring a variety of contemporary critical perspectives to bear on this visual material. In addition, Screech has selected a broad array of anecdotal materials from Edo-period sources to support his exploration of interesting topics ranging from the symbolism of pipes and blowing (pp. 162–75), to telescopes (pp. 221–28), to representations of sexual activities with foreigners (pp. 280–88). In this cornucopia of perspectives, issues, and images, there are many points worthy of comment. I shall, however, focus on only a few topics that are central to the overall approach of this work.

Screech issues several warnings to the reader about the complications inherent in historical writing coupled with the additional complexities of interpreting sexual themes and practices in foreign cultures. For instance, "Recent study of *shunga* has been undertaken by scholars rooted in modern sexuality and who have not sought to remove themselves from it nor to address the Edo context in the language of alterity. The danger of misunderstanding pictures by unconsidered application of modern categories can be shown. ... Our epistemologies of sex must be right for the period being discussed" (p. 92). Despite this alert, Screech employs a variety of modern and/or Western categories throughout the text, including the adoption of "pornography" as a functional translation for *shunga* and the use of gender analysis.

Another route for misinterpretation is also described: "A great danger in art history is the temptation to believe an appreciation of images is equivalent to historical analysis. Too often, a response to a work on an emotional level is equated with understanding and thus taken as sufficient. The argument would be that since works were originally produced to solicit emotions, if we, in the present, are able to feel something in front of them, then we have transcended the barrier of time. ... Reading Edo erotica in the same way it was read at the time is a problematic undertaking, and we can never be quite sure we feel what earlier viewers would have felt. ... Empathy teaches nothing about the historical moment of making. Distance is

important” (pp. 39–40). Yet in the following paragraph Screech describes an aspect of his own approach: “In the first chapter we looked at the uses and consumption of *shunga* imagery, including what I have called ‘normal’ pictures of the Floating World. I sought to overturn the romanticist notion that Edo pictures were somehow different from what we know similar images are produced for today” (p. 40). In one sentence the author not only collapses the desired “language of alterity” and “distance” but assumes that our knowledge of what “similar images are produced for today” is unproblematic.

The contradictions found in Screech’s statements are those inherent in the production of historical writing. The arguments for constructionist, reconstructionist, or deconstructionist approaches to the writing of history embody tensions between “accurate” portrayal and interpretation of the past and the insight that authors of history are inevitably shaped by an individual and collective present which configures the production of any narrative.<sup>5</sup> On the one hand, belief that objective representations of the past can be accurately created by appropriate examination and consideration of the evidence may lead to obfuscation of the linguistic and cultural presuppositions that underlie the text. On the other hand, obsessive absorption in the problematics of the present may result in a solipsistic disregard for historical evidence. The contradictions between these extremes is ultimately unresolvable; it may be productive, however, to negotiate the differences while accepting a measure of contradiction. This approach would result in historical accounts and interpretations being evaluated as to how productively these contradictions are recognized and navigated, it being assumed that a variety of narrative approaches might be not only diverse but also complementary. From this viewpoint, the apparent contradictions in Screech’s approach are of less importance than how well he negotiates these differences.

In the introduction Screech asserts, “Erotic images of the mid-Edo period can reasonably be called pornographic, and I intend to use that term” (p. 8). In describing “the urbane world of mid-Edo-period erotica,” he says, “We see something equivalent to what Peter Wagner has proposed as occurring at roughly the same time in Europe with the invention of a pure pornography, which is an ‘aim in itself’” (p. 8). Although the seemingly self-evident character of the term requires no definition for the author, in discussing his identification of *shunga* as pornography he acknowledges that the English term, “may carry baggage that is not entirely helpful” (p. 14). Later on, in a discussion of the visual and symbolic representation of genital organs, he suggests three points in which *shunga* differed from “the norms of early modern European pornography” (p. 185). Despite these caveats, Screech not only uses pornography as the equivalent of *shunga* but applies critiques of Western pornography directly to *shunga*, allowing that “these

[Western] norms will need some adjusting for the Edo situation, but in many ways they define *shunga* reasonably well” (p. 89). Indeed, Screech not only employs the pornography conceit throughout the text, but occasionally gets carried away, as in the final chapter where he collapses distinctions between pornography, *shunga*, and sex in a dramatic personification, “As pornography sought a larger space to occupy and the world of the pleasure districts came to seem insufficient, sex moved increasingly rapaciously through space as sex and *shunga* moved outwards” (p. 266).

Aside from some brief references to the volume of essays edited by Lynn Hunt (*The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500–1800*), Screech does not refer to the extreme complexity of the history and present-day situation of “pornography” in the West, complexity that has not only resisted continuing attempts to consistently define it in legislation and in court rulings, but has resulted in a large and growing literature that ranges from representing pornography as violence against women to claiming for it liberating, healing qualities. A term of such complexity and current controversy would seem a tricky analytic tool for investigating the imagery and culture of mid-Edo-period Japan.<sup>6</sup> To be useful, it needs a clear statement of the author’s own definition and its placement on the spectrum of the current scholarly debates over the term.

Only in the context beginning in the mid-1980s, when large numbers of unexpurgated *shunga* images were being published while similarly explicit photographs of genital areas in sexually orientated publications were still forbidden, does the term pornography vis-à-vis *shunga* seem useful. As the Japanese abbreviation porno has become commonplace in the postwar period, it may be justifiable to employ the term pornography in discussing a contemporary Japanese environment in which the conditions of production, distribution, and consumption of sexually explicit materials in Japan considerably resemble those found in many Western countries. As legal interpretation in Japan has gradually moved to allow increasingly explicit photographic images of genital areas, the pace of publication of collections of *shunga* imagery has slowed, possibly reflecting a market that spurns “artistic” imagery in favor of photographic detail. Popular assumptions about the difference between “erotica” and “pornography” greatly affect the reproduction, distribution, and consumption of sexual imagery. The distinctions made in America between X- and R-rated movies, between exhibiting the “art” of Mapplethorpe in museums and the art-book section of bookstores and labelling as pornography the similar but less “artistic” imagery sold outside of culturally privileged locations, have their parallels in contemporary Japan; there it seems that censorship of *shunga* declined before that of photographic images, because

*shunga*, as a subcategory of Ukiyo-e, participated in Ukiyo-e's current elevation to high-status art work. Indeed, as analyzed in the "Aesthetics and Access" chapter of Jane Juffer's *At Home with Pornography: Women, Sex, and Everyday Life*, similar materials are portrayed in the West as erotica or as pornography using quite different marketing strategies; contemporary Japan reveals a similar phenomenon. In the Edo period similar distinctions may well have been at work in the marketing, display, and targeting of an audience between the non-explicit *abuna-e* ("risky pictures") and explicit *shunga* or between versions of the same print that differed only in their level of general concealment or exposure.

Maintaining the near-identity of pornography and *shunga* serves Screech's thoroughly presented contention that the *raison d'être* of *shunga* was the provision of masturbatory imagery for males: "The reader will have to tolerate discussion of masturbation, for it is the central practice that accounts for the genres here discussed" (p. 7). Admitting that his is an "*a priori* assumption" (p. 9), he devotes the bulk of the first chapter to debunking any other interpretations of use and reiterates his own hypothesis throughout the text. Screech's candor in making sexual references is one of the refreshing aspects of his text, and it is certainly true that the use of *shunga* images for masturbation has been overlooked or intentionally suppressed in most of the critical literature. Nonetheless, his partiality for this insight prompts him to readily dismiss other, traditional, explanations of the use of *shunga*—as aids to learning about sex (pp. 34–35), as prophylaxis against house fires (p. 34), or as "an instrument to encourage sex between men and women" (p. 277).<sup>7</sup>

Screech's approach to sexual activity seems to be based on what might be called the "substitution model," wherein a person lacking one sexual outlet substitutes another. Masturbation, in particular, is seen as "substitutional sexual acts" (p. 33). He employs this formulation repeatedly. In the first chapter he sets out the importance of demographics: "...the shogunal capital of Edo (modern Tokyo), also the centre of printing, which may have been two-thirds male. This had clear implications for auto-eroticism and hence erotica. Many men lived in the large garrisons serving the Edo palaces ... and their barrack quarters deprived them of access to females" (p. 13). Although Screech skillfully discusses sex between men throughout the book, here he ignores the potential of such a world to foster sex between men and emphasizes its autoerotic potential exclusively. If men denied sexual opportunities with women need resort to masturbation as substitution, then men desirous of a human (as opposed to fantasy) partner who successfully sought out sexual relations with men would presumably have little need of masturbation—perhaps only men with no access to an acceptable partner masturbate. Indeed, Screech assumes that it was for lack of

money or time or in deference to social scruples that "pictures were viewed by single men unable to find a partner" (p. 42).<sup>8</sup> In his debunking of the "myth of shared viewings" he asserts, "Once real sex was initiated pictures would seem to become rapidly superfluous, with painted genitals losing appeal when live ones were at hand" (pp. 36–37). In this substitutional perspective men masturbated while viewing *shunga* when deprived of domestic or professional sexual relations. Although the lack of a desired partner may indeed affect sexual behavior, much of Edo-period literature and imagery suggests the nonexclusiveness of sexual behavior rather than the substitution of one behavior pattern for another. Books and pictures portray a given individual engaging in extramarital sex, in relations with the same sex and with the opposite sex (sometimes simultaneously), as well as in shared autoerotic practices. The substitution model is thus insufficient to explain complex patterns of sexual behavior.<sup>9</sup>

Among Screech's other rationales for interpreting *shunga* as primarily used in masturbation is "the euphemistic [term] 'laughing pictures' (*warai-e*) ... [which] sounds less coy when we realize that 'laughter' meant masturbation" (p. 14). It is true that in certain contexts *warai* refers to self-stimulation, as in *waraimono* as a substitute term for the *harigata* (artificial phallus) often depicted in autoerotic use in prints.<sup>10</sup> Though the term *warai-e* appears in the titles of a variety of *shunga* books, it is but one of many euphemisms employed for sexually explicit materials, which diminishes its metaphoric power.<sup>11</sup> The origin of the use of *warai* as a sexual metaphor is controversial; some have suggested that it came into use as a substitute for the related character for *saku* ("to bloom").<sup>12</sup> The character for *warai* has a long history of associations with sexual matters beyond masturbation; in China and Japan it is part of a compound expression for one selling sex.<sup>13</sup> More significant than the diverse sexual references for which it has been employed is the literal meaning of *warai*, "laughter," which points to the humorous intent of a large proportion of *shunga* images. Time and again absurd sexual situations or unlikely encounters in embarrassing circumstances suggest the same level of sexual humor found in *kyōka* and *senryū* verse.<sup>14</sup> Although laughter and masturbation are perhaps simultaneously possible, it seems more plausible that many images were intended more to stimulate a contemporary sense of humor than to incite physical activity. Screech overlooks the possibility that *shunga* may have appealed as much for humorous content as for salacious qualities.<sup>15</sup> That use as a masturbatory aid constitutes only one of a variety of motives for the acquisition of *shunga* does not reflect one way or another on the frequency of autoerotic practices at that time. Indeed, as Screech illustrates in "Produce" (ill. 3, ca. 1830), *Man Using a Portrait and an 'Edo shape'* (ill. 4, ca. 1760), and Kunimaro's *Nun Using a Portrait of Matsumoto Kōshirō* (?) (ill. 18, ca. 1830s), people

also masturbated without the use of explicit imagery. Again, is it not possible that married people masturbated or that some performed autoerotic activities with their partners? In other words, is this logic of substitution, which assumes that sex between men and women is primary and that other practices are adopted only when this primary focus is unavailable, a viable model for the sexual activities of the time?

Setting aside further arguments and evidence that *shunga* served purposes besides masturbation, Screech's single-minded focus on masturbation as the chief *raison d'être* of *shunga* conceals a larger omission. In defining the scope of his work, Screech states that "all works of painting and print that participated in the libidinous economy and which kindled or satisfied cravings for sexual activity are treated" (p. 7), setting up an overreaching expectation in the reader. The key term here is "libidinous economy," which the author employs in a largely metaphoric manner. This metaphorical usage, however, obscures the reality that the production, distribution, and consumption of *shunga* operated within a larger actual libidinal economy that made it profitable to mass-reproduce sexual imagery through the maintenance of complex ties to the social environment, in particular to the libidinous areas inhabited by the diverse worlds of sex workers, including those in and around the Kabuki theater.

The perception of *shunga* as solely an aid to masturbation as a substitutional activity eclipses the larger role of Ukiyo-e prints as advertisements for sexual workers (including *oiran*, *shinzō*, *kagema*, and other ranks and types), whose names and places of employment were often clearly stated on the prints.<sup>16</sup> These numerous prints, although rarely sexually explicit, constituted a kind of advertising poster; they encouraged the viewer to see the named person as a possible objective for a paid sexual encounter. Though the sex workers depicted were unaffordable by the wider viewing public, the images helped create and maintain their fame, enhancing their desirability in the eyes of those with the necessary finances to establish relations with them. As commercial sexual activities extended far beyond the licensed quarters of most cities to include the theatrical districts (where the workers were male), travel lodges, and river banks, commercial sex was accessible to all but the truly impoverished.<sup>17</sup> Given the tremendous scope of commercial sex at this time, the multiple ways Ukiyo-e prints celebrated the higher-priced purveyors and facilitated participation by giving their names and locations, and the printing of *saiken* (detailed guides to the licensed quarters) that sometimes included prices and ages, it is evident that the production of prints was closely tied into an economy built on the provision not only of fantasy but of actual sexual services. These prints of sexual workers seem to have related to their employment much as actor prints related to the Kabuki

theater and prints of wrestlers to the sumo ring; the three occupations shared significant customs, including the passing down of honorific names from one celebrated practitioner to another of a later generation. In *shunga* the depiction of ever more diverse settings and practices was likely prompted by the artists' and publishers' concern to maintain sales in an audience easily satiated with repetition. Indeed, the diversity found in all categories of Ukiyo-e prints was in part a response to similar economic concerns. This is but one of many factors that complicate the use of Ukiyo-e imagery to interpret contemporary sexual practices.

Rather than acknowledge the close economic connection between prints and professional sexual activities, Screech asserts that "in professional locations (brothels), *shunga* were kept well out of the way" (p. 37). This opinion echoes Seigle's statement that "in the seventeenth and most of the eighteenth centuries, the Yoshiwara was a relatively chaste and prudish community. Though pornography existed, it was not generated by the Yoshiwara population, nor was it particularly enjoyed by them."<sup>18</sup> Although Seigle's point about enjoyment is hard to demonstrate either pro or con, *shunga* and prints connected to sexual labor were drawn by artists familiar with the workers' situation and were published in great quantities in ways that publicized their services, demonstrating an interrelationship between prints and commercial sex that goes beyond the question of open display of sexual imagery. The great majority of sexual imagery, whether painted or printed, was made in the handscroll, album, and printed formats, suggesting that it was kept in drawers or boxes when not use, whether the locale was domestic or professional. From Screech's theory that *shunga* served only for substitutional sexual activities it would follow that sexual imagery would be unnecessary in licensed quarters. Yet numerous prints not only show *shunga* in professional circumstances, but demonstrate *shunga* being used as incitements to sexual activity, to suggest new positions, or to restore flagging desires.<sup>19</sup> The cross-cultural visual and literary record of association between sexual imagery and sexual work and workplace, whether for advertising or for additional stimulation, extends from historical times to the present, from Pompeii to Ming-period China, and although the visual evidence of Ukiyo-e prints depicting the licensed quarters does not constitute incontrovertible proof of the use of *shunga*, it should stand until disproven. In addition, the publisher Tsutaya Jūzaburō was located beside the front gate of Yoshiwara, suggesting that his erotic works were purchased by visitors to the Yoshiwara along with his regularly published *saiken* guides to the sex workers of the district.<sup>20</sup>

Turning to the topic of gender construction, Ukiyo-e as a whole provides a plethora of fascinating examples, yet Screech's employment of gender, although clear in places

(pp. 92–93), is too often vague or misleading. Often “gender” seems to become a sophisticated code word for the physiological sex of the body, as in “the gender of the masturbator” (p. 16), or when “gender” is sprinkled into a discussion of physical sex differences in illness and autopsy regimes (pp. 96–98). This confusion of sex (physiology) with gender (bilaterally disposed<sup>21</sup> patterns of behavior) is clearly revealed in the following passage: “Here we encounter a fundamental difference in ways of construing sex and gender: the Edo sense, and that of its antecedents, was that concerted deportment in a given gender role will shift the person across into that gender; this new gender will to all intents and purposes become the person’s new sex” (p. 100). Far from “concerted deportment in a given gender role [shifting] the person across into that gender” being a special aspect of Edo-period culture, one of the important insights of gender analysis is that this is true in general, as well-practiced transvestites can attest. Simultaneously, it is also clear that shifting into a new gender is just that and nothing more, and thus the contemporary international fashion for hormone treatments and transsexual surgery in the attempt to make the physical sex correspond to a new gender role.

Although Screech’s extensive bibliography includes only a few titles that focus on gender construction and analysis, one of them is Gregory Pflugfelder’s article, *Strange Fates: Sex, Gender and Sexuality in Torikaebaya Monogatari*,<sup>22</sup> in which he provides definitions of sex and gender with a clarity that would have greatly expedited Screech’s analysis of Kabuki actors assuming female roles, his discussion of “unisex styles,” and so forth.<sup>23</sup> Pflugfelder makes the additional distinction between “sex,” denoting biological sex, and “sexuality” and “sexual,” referring to socially and historically constructed patterns of sexual practice. These definitions have a great potential for clarifying the analysis of the employment of Kabuki actors and other males associated with the theatre districts as professional sex partners, a topic Screech raises on several occasions.<sup>24</sup>

The subject of sexual activity between males arises in more than thirty places, initiating discussions that occasionally extend to three or four pages. The ease with which Screech moves between discussions of same-sex and opposite-sex amatory relations admirably avoids the ghettoization of same-sex activities within a single chapter or section. Nonetheless, while not changing his well-balanced distribution, an additional chapter or chapters focussed more specifically on same-sex relations would have allowed deeper analysis of some of the most involved and interesting Ukiyo-e imagery related to gender and sexual practice.

Judith Butler’s emphasis that gender is performative, “being produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which

bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self,”<sup>25</sup> allows for an effective analysis of the behavior of the male *kagama* who enacted female gender roles as a part of their work, including sexual labor.<sup>26</sup> Although most often employed by males seeking sex with men who performed female gender roles, *kagama* were also employed by women desiring service from men displaying female gender behavior. This latter practice, testified to in various contemporary texts,<sup>27</sup> is occasionally depicted in prints, such as Utagawa Toyokuni’s triptych *Kagama to Goten Jochū* (ca. 1830–1844) in the Victoria and Albert Museum.<sup>28</sup> This print depicts three *kagama* entertaining three women with *samisen* and conversation. These situations raise the possibility of sexual encounters between members of the same gender but different sexes, the reverse of the same-sex relations between opposite genders represented by male employment of *kagama*, and different again from sexual relations between two males both of whom displayed the same gender behavior. The popularity of male *kagama* led to the development of female “*kagama*,” or women who adopted the complex gender display of a man acting the female gender.<sup>29</sup> This layered gender portrayal was already found on the Kabuki stage, when male actors played women disguised as men. This array of gender performances raises many questions worthy of inquiry as to the popularity of opposite genders in same-sex encounters and the predilection among women for men appearing in female gender roles.<sup>30</sup>

The complexity of gender roles is revealed in prints introduced in Screech’s text, such as Harushige’s (Shiba Kōkan, 1747–1818) *Amagoi* from the series *Fūryū Nana Komachi* (ill. 53, ca. 1770).<sup>31</sup> The two principal figures are a *yūjo* who is scratching the neck of a *wakashu* who is looking intently at a Harunobu print of Osen, the celebrated woman who served tea next to Kasamori Jinja (Fig. 1). Naitō Masato’s identification of the central figure as a *wakashu* may rely in part on the wide, front-tied *obi* that implies a feminine gender role despite the shaved pate visible under the swept-back forelock of his headdress.<sup>32</sup> The nature of his gaze is ambiguous. Does it represent sexual longing for this celebrated tea seller or envy of the popular acclaim for her performance of the female gender role? The scene is further complicated by the figure seated next to the *hibachi*. Although the comb and flower-tipped hairpins are appropriate to the role of a *shinzō* (an adolescent attendant to a senior *yūjo*), the hair style is otherwise male-identified down to the shaved scalp visible under the forelock. Is this a woman with a masculine-influenced hair style or a *kagama* revealing with his bare scalp an indication of an underlying male gender status? The rich complexity of sexual and gender practices as portrayed in Ukiyo-e prints and paintings such as these still awaits significant analysis.





Fig. 1. Suzuki Harushige (Shiba Kōkan, 1747–1818). Detail of *Amagoi* from *Fūryū Nana Komachi*. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Courtesy of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri (Purchase: Nelson Trust), 32–143/54.

Throughout the text Screech argues for a definition of *shunga* as limited to explicit imagery created from 1700 to 1820, suggesting that earlier and later depictions of sexual activities were of a fundamentally different character.<sup>33</sup> He asserts that sexual imagery prior to the eighteenth century “typically ... have to do with humour and parody, and seldom show couples copulating” and that “phallic competitions, farting, ... disappeared as renditions of elegant bedrooms and fine-clad lovers emerged” (pp. 7–8). Yet a survey of published materials reveals many images that suggest a quite different chronology. There is a tradition that phallic contest scrolls were initiated in the late Heian period by the noted painter Toba Kakuyū Sōjō (1053–1140), whose name is associated with a handscroll *Yōmotsu Kurabe* (*Competition of Male Members*) on this theme in the collection of the Konshō-in subtemple of Tōji.<sup>34</sup> Although no extant painting can unquestionably be shown to be the work of Kakuyū, the common attribution of comic ink sketches to him gave birth to a broader category titled *Toba-e*. *Toba-e* handscrolls were especially popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and most of the numerous comic handscrolls depicting phallic competitions, farting, or comparative sexual gymnastics date from recent times, whereas examples earlier than the seventeenth century are rare.<sup>35</sup> Even if the tradition had ancient origins, it seems that its popularity increased throughout the Edo period. Moreover, prior to the eighteenth century, images of sexual intercourse, far from being rare, constitute the primary sexual themes from Muromachi paintings to the seventeenth-century *shunga* prints. The oldest extant sexually explicit handscroll may

be the version of *Chigo no sōshi* (*Tales of Acolytes*) with a colophon dated to 1321 in the Sanbō-in collection at Daigo-ji. It depicts a variety of adult men copulating with younger men with feminine hair styles in a range of positions.<sup>36</sup> The many versions of the *Koshibagaki Sōshi* (*Tales of a Brushwood Fence*) handscroll claim to be derived from a late Heian-period tradition recounting the illicit affair between the imperial princess Nariko residing at Nonomiya Jinja and Taira no Munemitsu in 986. Although the oldest extant example may date from the early Muromachi period, it believably suggests a late Heian atmosphere in dress and furnishings.<sup>37</sup> The various scenes depict intercourse between a male and female figure in court dress in a variety of architectural settings and in the nude against a blank background.<sup>38</sup> Not only did coital positions remain unchanged over hundreds of years, until the end of the Edo period, in the many copies found in these two handscroll traditions but very similar positions are seen in Ukiyo-e prints of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although hair, clothing, and painting styles changed continuously over time, the types and positions of sexual relations show a fundamental consistency rather than the evolution suggested by Screech. That attitudes towards this genre may have evolved or varied is a separate and more complex question, yet evidence for such changes may be better sought in textual accounts, given the remarkable continuity found in the depiction of specific acts and positions.

Screech’s attempt to define *shunga* as specific to the mid-Edo period extends beyond his contention that earlier salacious imagery typically excluded intercourse, to his



assertion that “eighteenth-century *shunga* never entertained the possibility that a partner might be unwilling; no one was forced” (p. 277), whereas later “actual rape becomes a *shunga* fetish, either by friends and relatives or by burglars and cut-throats” (p. 279). Referring to changes that began “around the second decade of the nineteenth century” (p. 8), he notes, “A new impetus is seen towards depiction of coercive, violent encounters. Despite the prominence of prostitutes in earlier pictures, with all that this implies of exploitative relations, equality had been honed into the *pictorial* norm” (p. 9). These thoughts eventually lead to his concluding passage: “The period treated in this book was not a golden age of sex for all relationships were founded on inescapable disequilibriums of powers. But it may have been one of the finest times in the history of erotic pictures. The late eighteenth century was at least an age when parties wished to represent sex as pleasurably shared and mutually sustaining. ... We should consider the possibility that it was the very commercialism of Edo sex, and the self-evidence of its not being the result of people choosing to come together, that required erotica to compensate with such profuse lies” (p. 288).

But is eighteenth-century *shunga* really so egalitarian and free of coercive imagery? The greatest handicap in resolving this point (and in making broad statements in this area in general) is that even now only a fraction of the total amount of *shunga* imagery is available for study, and much of the published material consists of collections that reflect the interests of the editors more than a proportionate representation of the subjects and themes originally published. Nonetheless, eighteenth-century images of coercive sex may not be all that rare. Okumura Masanobu’s (1686–1764) untitled book, circa 1744–1747, includes an image of a fully dressed samurai assaulting a woman out of doors, he restraining her contorted body as she attempts to stab him with a knife.<sup>39</sup> In Katsukawa Shunshō’s (1726–1792) *Ehon Chiyoda Meshi* of 1786 there is a scene of a robber assaulting a nude woman while threatening to sell her after assaulting her equally nude father who is holding her shoulders down.<sup>40</sup> Chōbunsai Eishi’s (1756–1829) untitled album, circa 1789–1800, illustrates a bandit assaulting a female traveller on the roadway as her male companion flees in the distance.<sup>41</sup> Finally, Kitagawa Utamaro’s (1754–1806) *Ehon Futamigata*, circa 1801–1803, shows a masked burglar with drawn sword having intercourse with a bound woman in her own home.<sup>42</sup> Although these are only four of many examples, the chronological range and the prominence of the artists suggests the widespread appearance (if not a precise percentage) of coercive imagery in the eighteenth century. It is true that most of the dialogues accompanying such scenes suggest the common conceit of someone being forced to go beyond the bounds of propriety to achieve what they had long desired. This kind of irony

appears in other prints, such as Utamaro’s 1788 *Kappa to Ama*, which depicts a struggling *ama* (underwater diver) being forced by two male *kappa* (river imps) as another female diver watches from above with a smile.<sup>43</sup> The incongruity of the onlooking *ama*’s reaction seems to have been humorously intended, as is also true for many of the violation scenes found in *shunga* after 1820. To assess the significance and social impact of assault scenes during the Edo period requires untangling a complexity of meanings that are unlikely to be reducible to a single simple explanation.<sup>44</sup> As the tradition of violent sexual imagery extends throughout the eighteenth century, it weakens the argument that such a great change occurred in the mid-nineteenth century as to constitute a new genre.

As Screech notes, in Ukiyo-e imagery dealing with sex workers, some of whom had been indentured into the business as children, the implication of mutual choice or consent seems greatly compromised. If these images do tell such “profuse lies,” are they outright falsehoods, concealing the coercion and the lack of free choice of partners that were common knowledge, or are they, rather, deceptive in the manner of most commercial advertising, suggesting that Yoshiwara and similar places could provide happiness not only in sexual matters but in the consumption of fine music, food, and drink accompanied by elegant and witty companions? The Edo-period context—in which most marriages were arranged, most men followed in their fathers’ occupations, class mobility between social strata was limited, when even travel was restricted in various ways—shaped the whole concept of freedom of choice. To the degree that such a concept existed, it was usually framed by the assumptions of the social order, which validated the social conditions as they were, including the institutionalization of sex work. From this standpoint, lack of choice might be lamented in double-suicide Kabuki dramas, but social norms were rarely challenged or seriously questioned except under the stress of famine or during the gradual collapse of the Tokugawa regime in the late Edo period.

Setting a time limit to his study of *shunga* may easily be accepted as an arbitrary necessity for achieving a period focus, yet the justification that these chronological boundaries are found in the material itself, that the sexual imagery of 1700 to 1820 differs dramatically from its antecedents and sequelae, skews the interpretation. Such a periodization raises questions about the singularity of the time period; it also ignores the continuities within the tradition of erotic imagery. Another approach might be to contrast the unique aspects of sexual imagery of that period with the ongoing features of the tradition, including the persistency of certain sexual acts and positions, the economic basis for the production and sale of the prints, and their relation to the licensed quarters.



Fig. 2. Suzuki Harunobu (1724–1770). *Autumn Moon of the Mirror Stand* from the album *Fūryū Zashiki Hakkei* (ca. 1768). From Kobayashi Tadashi, ed., *Suzuki Harunobu: Fūryū Zashiki Hakkei* (Tokyo: Gakushū Kenkyūsha, 1994).

Another area of interest is the author's intent to "offer close readings of some images ... in order to assess their status as figures of representation within the larger field of painting and printing" (p. 9). This responsible approach may be difficult to execute given the range of painting traditions that need to be considered to make certain interpretations. In his discussion of a print by Hokusai, Screech refers to the artist's production of "a patterned kimono written flat across the male body, as if to deny it any epistemological validity. The representation of fabric flat across folds and pleats was Hokusai's choice; he was able to show how design is effected by bunching where he wished to" (p. 122). Although this was Hokusai's decision (or at least his carver's),<sup>45</sup> the notion that Hokusai was attempting to deny epistemological validity to the body is weakened when we consider that "flat" fabric design and design modulated by fabric folds had both been used in Japanese figure painting for hundreds of years.<sup>46</sup>

Screech is intrigued by an instance in which Hiroshige (1797–1858) copied a composition of Utamarō's; "Why did Hiroshige borrow this picture and why, in borrowing it, did he change it? It seems unlikely, in view of his enormously prolific output, that Hiroshige was just sparing himself labour. ... I suspect that Hiroshige was deliberately referring back to an original he expected his readers to know" (p. 124). More pertinent than the slim possibility that people half a century later would quickly recall a minor work of Utamarō's is the fact that such borrowings were standard practice throughout the history of Ukiyo-e

prints. The more prints one surveys, the more examples of just such borrowings multiply. Harunobu is famous for his use of the works of his mentor, Nishikawa Sukenobu (1671–1751); indeed, the Harunobu print (ca. 1768) *Autumn Moon of the Mirror Stand* from the album *Fūryū Zashiki Hakkei* (ill. 56, Fig. 2) is adapted from an image found in Sukenobu's *Neya no Kusutama* (ca. 1716–36; Fig. 3).<sup>47</sup> As Sukenobu worked decades earlier in Kyoto, either the Harunobu work needs to be taken as a view of an older Kyoto (rather than a contemporary Edo) locale, or the architectural differences between the two were so minor as to go unnoticed by the contemporary viewer. This example, beyond illustrating the problematic aspects of the interpretation of prints, poses the question concerning the motive for borrowing. Screech offers Hiroshige's prolificacy as a reason why he would find it unnecessary to borrow a composition, but it may be instead that such a voluminous output could only be maintained by regular borrowings. Indeed, the popular image of Ukiyo-e artists being so overwhelmed by their creative powers as to generate the nonstop productivity that so many careers illustrate belies the reality that even noted print designers were paid very little for their work and that their prodigious output was often driven by economic forces.<sup>48</sup> Considering the broader context of Edo painting, in which Kano artists endlessly repeated old compositions, literati painters spun variations on the Chinese paintings they viewed, and Tosa and Rinpa painters used ancient works like image banks, it is likely that those viewers who

Fig. 3. Nishikawa Sukenobu (1671–1751). Illustration from *Neya no Kusutama* (ca. 1716–1736). From Fukuda Kazuhiko, *Edo no Seiaigaku* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1987), p. 17.



noticed the resemblance to Utamaro in the Hiroshige print would have recognized this as standard artistic process. Fully self-conscious references to an artist such as Utamaro may have first occurred in the works of Yoshitoshi (1839–1892), generated by Meiji-period nostalgic interest in the lifestyles and artists of the Edo period.<sup>49</sup>

Screech's treatment of the above-mentioned *Autumn Moon of the Mirror Stand* by Harunobu (Fig. 2) raises further questions of interpretation. That Edo-period culture was male dominated is easily agreed but hardly demonstrated by this print of sexual activity performed leisurely before open *shoji* doors, the man smoking a pipe while the nearly nude woman combs her hair and casually addresses him under her raised arm. It is hard to understand how this scene supports the statement that “control and discipline are essential in this world, and an unschooled freedom is quite impossible” (p. 136).

Screech employs a variety of terminology for sexual relations between men, including several Japanese terms, especially *nanshoku*; English terms include “homoeroticism” (p. 63) and “homosexuals” (p. 294) but he prefers “male-male sexuality” (p. 9). The terms homosexuality and heterosexuality have drawn increasing criticism as modern constructs that assume an underlying monolithic sexual structure rooted in psychology and/or biology.<sup>50</sup> Using the constructions male-male and female-male directs attention to actions rather than fixed identities. As the controversy over appropriate terminology increases, one wishes that Screech had further elaborated his brief remarks regarding usage (pp. 9, 91).

Though the author occasionally uses the term “sex-worker” (p. 53), the use of the terms “prostitute” and “prostitution” throughout the text could also be revisited. In contemporary studies of commercial sex activities, the term sex worker has gained increasing recognition. Kamala Kempadoo states the basic position: “the notion of the sex worker has emerged as a counterpart to traditionally derogatory names. ... it is a term that suggests we view prostitution not as an identity ... but as an income-generating activity ... for women and men.”<sup>51</sup> Jo Bindman elaborates: “The designation of prostitution as a special human rights issue emphasizes the distinction between sex work and other forms of female, dangerous and low-status labor, such as domestic or food service work, or work in factories and on the land. It hides the commonality, the shared experience of exploitation, which links people in all such work. ... An employment or labor perspective, designating prostitution as sex work, can bring this work into the mainstream debate on human, women's and workers' rights.”<sup>52</sup>

Although the term sex worker has emerged from studies investigating the contemporary worldwide situation, its use may help achieve a balanced perspective in Western studies of sexual commerce in Japan and elsewhere. Heretofore the overriding tendency has been to create a mystique around the lives led amid luxurious architectural settings and elegant fashions by the elite members of the licensed quarters.<sup>53</sup> Emphasizing their indentured servitude is a valuable corrective but should not be taken to the point of negating the value of the skills they developed.

Both these approaches have likely contributed to the near total neglect of the historical records and achievements of individual women. Although quantities of letters and poetry in fine calligraphy remain, they have gone little studied, even in Japan. The information in the *saiken* guides, coupled with prints showing named women, could also be collated to reveal the public marketing image of individual women. The lack of such studies of individuals in contrast to the volume of publications regarding daily life within the licensed quarters attests the tendency to stereotype women and men either as elegant actors on a social stage or as utterly manipulated victims, in either case obviating the perception of their individual careers, achievements, and sufferings. Despite Screech's warning about contemporary attitudes interfering with our historical perspective (cited at the beginning), this is an area where awareness of current trends in the study of the lives and circumstances of our contemporaries may help achieve a more illuminating approach to the past.

The consideration of female viewership of *shunga* is a related issue. The reference to reading with one hand found in the subtitle of the Japanese version is drawn from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782): "those dangerous books that a beautiful woman of the world finds bothersome because, as she says, one can only read them with one hand."<sup>54</sup> This reference to a female audience for pornography in eighteenth-century France is augmented by mention of Japanese prints that depict women masturbating while looking at *nise-e* ("paintings of resemblance") prints of actors, and by a discussion of works by the female painter Inagaki Tsurujo (act. late 18th c.) that briefly considers a female viewpoint. Nonetheless, "despite Rousseau's *bon mot* ..., which puts pornography firmly into the zone of female consumption," Screech usually adopts, "the more usual stance [which] is to see the preponderance of erotica as pertaining to a male (and heterosexual) gaze" (p. 88). He continues, "These norms will need some adjusting for the Edo situation, but in many ways they define *shunga* reasonably well" (p. 89), concluding, "Edo pornography seems to have been useable by women, although whether this resulted in the creating of specifically female-oriented imagery, or whether women and girls consumed pictures destined to perpetuate male fantasies, is a moot point" (p. 89).

Although the questions of viewership and viewing are complex and establish multiple vantage points (rather than singular or binary), they become moot only when not explored. Prints from a wide variety of time periods show women viewing *shunga* prints and handscrolls.<sup>55</sup> Yet assessments of their meaning today range as broadly as assessments of the use of the *harigata* (artificial phallus). Seigle denies sexual relations between women: "... certainly there was no tradition of homosexuality among women. The *shunga* depicting two women engaged in activities using

an artificial device ... are usually products of highly imaginative non-Yoshiwara male artists. Such artificial devices would have embarrassed Yoshiwara women or made them burst out laughing."<sup>56</sup> Tanaka, on the contrary, affirms the Edo-period use of the *harigata* for masturbation and in relations between women and between men and women as seen in many prints.<sup>57</sup> Due to the advertising nature of prints that named prominent figures in Yoshiwara, it is a near certainty that the women of the licensed quarters were concerned about their representation in prints. The depictions of ever evolving modes of fashion and hair styles would have also interested a wider female audience, who would have been drawn as well by curiosity toward and enjoyment of sexual imagery.

To infer possible viewpoints of Edo-period women toward *shunga* is difficult, but not to make the attempt is to risk the denial of their existence for an interpretation that questions and analyzes only male attitudes and practices. Here again, recent studies of female viewership of sexually explicit materials in the West suggest lines of inquiry about attitudes of women during the Edo period.<sup>58</sup> Although depictions of female sexual desire in *shunga* have often been thought to represent merely a male fantasy of women always ready for sex, it has also been proposed that they imply the existence and approval of some forms of female sexual desire.<sup>59</sup> The recent work of Tanaka Yūko maintains that female sexual desire, acknowledged during the Edo period, was gradually denied under the influence of Western-style medical and religious instruction during the Meiji period.<sup>60</sup> Although acknowledging that the main production of *shunga* was by men for male consumption, Tanaka and Saeki Junko maintain that *shunga* reveals some aspects of female sexual practice and desire in the Edo period.<sup>61</sup> Admittedly the work of these and other scholars is far from conclusive, but the inauguration of research into female sexual practices and interests in the Edo period will help correct the biased view that *shunga* was an exclusively male preserve.<sup>62</sup>

The reading of *Sex and the Floating World* is enhanced by consulting the earlier Japanese version of the text, *Shunga: Katate de Yomu Edo no E (Shunga: Edo Images Read with One Hand)*, published in 1998. Not only does the Japanese version have a proper-name index not found in the English volume, but the characters for many of the obscure print and book titles (often with *furigana* readings) are of great help in referencing original source materials. Screech has been fortunate in his long working relationship with Takayama Hiroshi, a professor of eighteenth-century English literature at Tōkyō Toritsu Daigaku, who translated five of the six books on different aspects of Edo culture that Screech has published in Japan since 1995. A prolific author and translator, Takayama's publications include a volume of discussions on Edo-period culture with some of the noted scholars of the field.<sup>63</sup> Some of the titles and

order of sections of the Japanese text differ from the English version; the first two chapters become three in the English version. Related passages can be located by using the name index or by scanning the text to find the same illustrations (not all images appear in both texts). Although much of the two books, including the chief arguments, is the same, there are many small differences in the discussions. The English version will be the standard for the West, but the Japanese version has virtues beyond the index and characters. In some areas there is more detail in the Japanese, including the use of technical terms and considerations that may have been dropped from the English by editors worried about reaching a wider audience. The Japanese version employs several period appellations for Kyoto, including Kyō and Kyōraku, while the English version consistently employs the legitimate, yet comparatively obscure, Keishi, which may puzzle readers who miss the first-use footnote. On occasion a passage that is clear in Japanese is harder to follow in English. For example, in the above discussion of Harunobu's *Autumn Moon of the Mirror Stand* (Fig. 2), repeated reference is made to a flowering potted plant called "a rock bamboo" (*iwatake*) (p. 136).<sup>64</sup> A look at this discussion in the Japanese version (p. 105) quickly reveals this plant to be the *sekichiku*. Literally translated, this can be called the poetic "stone bamboo," yet *sekichiku* is actually *Dianthus chinensis*, a close relative of the *nadeshiko* (*Dianthus superbus*), more commonly translated as pinks. As the rendering of many Japanese titles and names is vexing to everyone who attempts it, direct access to the terms in Japanese is often helpful. One can now hope, with the advance of word processing systems, that it will become standard for scholarly publications in the West to include characters for significant names and terms. That Screech has frequently published bilingually is admirable; however, the differences between the resulting versions have yet to be widely appreciated, as scholars have tended to read the publications only in their native tongue.

A variety of valuable publications have appeared in Japan since the appearance of Screech's twin volumes on *shunga*. The most significant may be the two volumes of essays, *Ukiyoe Shunga o Yomu*, by Shirakura Yoshihiko, Tanaka Yūko, Hayakawa Monta, Mihashi Osamu, and Saeki Junko, which appeared late in 2000. Each of the eight essays explores in depth specific questions concerning *shunga*. The first essay by Shirakura is framed as a critical response to Screech's assertions that *shunga* prints constitute pornography whose prime motive is aiding male masturbation; Shirakura argues for a more multifaceted approach that takes better account of the cultural context of the time of production. Tanaka Yūko focuses on the topic of what is hidden and what is displayed in *shunga* imagery. This deceptively simple question reveals a fascinating development as she traces the historical changes in presentation through noted examples from the late seven-

teenth century through the Edo period. Shirakura explores the male *akusō* ("evil countenance") that makes such a contrastive counterpart to the standard depictions of female beauty in Ukiyo-e. The texts accompanying the images reveal intent to generate reactions ranging from humor to revulsion, with multiple interpretive possibilities including the ridicule of lower-status groups. The second volume begins with an illuminating essay by Tanaka Yūko on prints dealing with voyeurism, or *nozoki*. Hayakawa Monta, after noting that the majority of women portrayed in *shunga* are not courtesans, initiates an examination of *jionna*, women other than sex workers who are portrayed as actively seeking sexual experiences. The second volume concludes with an essay by Saeki Junko on the relation of *shunga* and *yūjo*. Once again taking issue with Screech's interpretation of *waraie* and the labeling of *shunga* as pornography, Saeki explores depictions of sex workers in a variety of periods and circumstances. Although the essays in these volumes deepen our comprehension of the themes reviewed, their intention is to raise interpretative questions that complicate and diversify our understanding of the material rather than reductively produce simple principles of interpretation.

Hayakawa Monta has been especially productive in several interesting small volumes that explore the *shunga* that portray love between men and the *mitate shunga* of Harunobu.<sup>65</sup> The least explored topic he has addressed is the appearance of children in *shunga*, in his *Shunga no Naka no Kodomotachi* of 2000. The recent belated interest in depictions of children in Ukiyo-e has resulted in a book and an exhibition catalogue and, most recently, in the Tokyo National Museum's exhibition on representations of children in art,<sup>66</sup> but Hayakawa is the first to consolidate the diverse images of this well-known but little discussed theme. Although quite tentative in his conclusions, Hayakawa suggests that children appear in the context of humorous themes, as witnesses rather than participants, and proposes that the circumstances of the period may have generated a less absolute attitude toward concealment of sexual activities from one's children. The question of what constitutes childhood is raised by the depiction of people from their early teens in sexual activities. Hayakawa interprets this in the context of marriages that were then consummated at such ages. That sex workers also began their employment in their teens compares with the use of children in mines and heavy industry, a worldwide practice in the nineteenth century. The nature and duration of childhood was as often determined by economics and class as by ethical concerns. Although his work is introductory in nature and rarely employs self-conscious theory, Hayakawa continues to be in the forefront of addressing neglected and controversial areas of *shunga* imagery and texts.

The widespread recognition that reading the texts accompanying *shunga* is critical to their interpretation has

been met with two new dictionaries of the frequently esoteric vocabulary employed. Although neither has all the scholarly apparatus one would desire, both are serious efforts to provide access to the needed vocabulary. Shibata Chiaki's *Seigo Jiten* covers historical terms to contemporary usage, frequently quoting passages from dated publications as examples of use. Komatsu Keibun's *Iro no Jiten* is the larger and more scholarly work, with some entries comprising brief essays on the historical evolution of usage patterns. Employing these dictionaries in reading the texts set in modern type greatly streamlines the interpretative process, although comparing different modern-type versions of the same text sometimes reveals that the ambiguities of the original cursive scripts can give rise to significant variations of interpretation even now.

Beyond the problems of interpretation, one of the biggest obstacles in assessing *shunga* is lack of access to the wide range of materials that have not been reprinted in modern times. In this regard, it is significant to note that the late Hayashi Yoshikazu bequeathed his collection of fifteen thousand items to the Art Research Center of Ritsumeikan Daigaku in Kyoto. The center is now conserving the items and hopes eventually to place the entire collection of images and texts on their Internet site. Although this is a mammoth project that will take years, possibly decades, to complete, they held their first exhibition of 114 items in November 2001 and the initial offerings can now be accessed at their site.<sup>67</sup> Now that art museums have grown increasingly comfortable with displaying explicit imagery, such as the *shunga* that appeared as a part of the fall 2001 special exhibition *Hyuuman Imeeji* (*Human Image*) at the Kyoto National Museum, we can hope that problems of access to the large collections in public institutions will gradually be reduced.

In this article I have dwelt at length on aspects of Screech's work with which I take issue because of the range of the international response to the interpretations he has proposed. The wealth of Screech's anecdotal detail engagingly guides the reader to an impressive variety of Edo-period texts, though the quick treatment of the encyclopedic range of topics and references often makes one wish the author would slow down to achieve greater depth. Nonetheless, the whirlwind movement from idea to image to citation has the exhilarating punch of a well-delivered lecture. Indeed, the smooth flow of the text combined with his insistent wordplay makes for lively reading even of complex material.

Among the contradictions in the academic world today is the confrontation between expanding expectations and shrinking timetables. As the recognition of interdisciplinary perspectives has grown, the assumption that dissertations employ multiple methodologies, or at least display an understanding of them, flies in the face of many efforts by university programs to shorten the classwork for graduate

study, so that students now need to master multiple fields in less time than was previously allowed for one field. If this standard holds for dissertations, it holds even more firmly for the subsequent books necessary for acquiring and developing professional standing. Some institutions now expect two books to be completed for tenure in the time previously allowed for one. In this push-comes-to-shove environment the pressure to strategically choose small topics that can be completed swiftly is almost overwhelming. Despite the claims for quality, it is quantity and timeliness that are being rewarded.

One of the swiftest avenues for producing text is to apply a methodology from another discipline or a different geographic or cultural area to a new body of material. If methodology or theory can be regarded as a kind of grammar, then the new material can be inserted into this grammar and a new interpretive text be generated rather rapidly. This practice is not without pitfalls, however, a major instance being the tailoring of the result to merely confirm the validity of the method. Well-deployed method does not consolidate new materials into the presuppositions of the method (the everything-new-is-old-again approach), but rather generates whole new vistas that allow for the discovery of genuinely original perceptions.

Discussions of method and theory are of late popularly presented as various versions of the "new" versus "old" art history.<sup>68</sup> This dualistic view may be counterproductive. Any assertion, no matter how matter of fact, involves unspoken theoretical assumptions. Likewise, all art-historical theory at some point relies on information of some sort, whether it be the existence of an art work or the interpretation of a historical text, either of which requires assessment and confirmation. Ultimately it is the interaction of information (including sensory input) and interpretation (theory) that generates meaning, and the struggle for higher ground between "new and old" impedes the development of a productive synergism.

Given that theoretical considerations as such have been a rather late entry into the realm of Japanese art history, discussion of them has often been unproductively vague, for instance, someone may be said to "do" theory, making it unclear if the person in question is discussing theory, employing theory (in the sense of methodology), or, rarest of all, creating theory. Sometimes people merely use the terminology of theory without any clear conception of what they are saying. It is always disquieting when an art-historical text employs terminology of current theory but neither footnotes, bibliography, nor skill in usage indicate familiarity with the texts that generated or significantly deployed that theoretical approach. This practice is exacerbated by the growing time pressures within academia that are reinforced by quantitative demands for publication. The appearance of "doing" theory can be quickly created, but to sensitively and productively employ theory requires



a clear understanding of the conceptual framework, which mandates extensive reading and thought. Furthermore, despite assumptions that theory can be culturally neutral and equally applicable with little adjustment around the globe, theory is always a product of the culture in which it arises. To productively transfer it to a different cultural context requires both care and extensive knowledge of that other culture. This being the case, one hopes that at some point art-historical theory can be generated from within the Japanese cultural context—not as a kind of neo-*nihonjinron* but as part of an approach to the culture and art that is less screened through a Western intellectual filter. This is part of the larger need to develop art-historical methodologies of such significance that other disciplines find them fruitful to employ, much as art historians now enlist the methodologies of other disciplines for their applicability to art history. In fact, the relation of sexuality, vision, image, and text in *shunga* may be one productive area for the generation of new theory in the future.

That I have raised questions in regard to Screech's text does not diminish my appreciation for its significance. I am confident that others will likewise argue points of this discussion. Indeed, what is *not* needed is a struggle to establish a correct, yet hegemonic, approach to issues of sexuality and gender. Few areas of study are more likely to produce a spectrum of insights arising from an equally diverse array of subject positions and critical perspectives. As these issues have been so long ignored by much of the academic world (even the current activity often seems a tardy reaction to developments in popular culture), what is most needed is frank discussion with the expectation of finding not consensus but diversity, and careful attention to each voice, especially if it is different from one's own. Tolerance of discourse may seem a commonplace nowadays, yet nowhere is it more important than in these topics that reach so deeply into our emotional, ethical, public, and private lives.

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## Notes

1. Among the many recent discussions are “Sexuality and Edo Culture 1750–1850,” Indiana University, 1995; “Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field,” annual meeting, Association of Asian Studies, Honolulu, 1996; and the group discussions presented in *Bungaku*, vol. 10 (no. 3) (Summer 1999).

2. As *Sex in the Floating World* was published without an index, parenthetical page numbers have been appended to quotations for ease of reference.

3. Paul Schalow, “Review of Timon Screech’s *Sex and the Floating World*,” *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 26 (Summer 2000) p. 420.

4. Allen Hockley, “Shunga: Function, Context, Methodology,” *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 55 (Summer 2000) p. 263.

5. See Alun Munslow’s description and critique of various positions on the writing of history in his *Deconstructing History*.

6. While granting points of similarity between Western pornography and shunga, Sumie Jones and Saeki Junko question the validity of the porn label for shunga in Ueno Chizuko et al., “(Zadankai) Shunpon • Shunga no Kenkyū no Rinkai,” *Bungaku*, vol. 10 (no. 3) (1999), pp. 118ff.

7. Although Hockley agrees with Screech on this point (Hockley, “Shunga,” pp. 257–58), Saeki Junko criticizes Screech’s dismissal of these other explanations, situating this dismissal with Screech’s neglect of the ethnographic background of Edo-period popular culture and religious practice necessary for interpreting *shunga* in the Japanese version of his text. See Ueno Chizuko et al., “(Zadankai) Shunpon • Shunga no Kenkyū no Rinkai,” pp. 122–23.

8. In the earlier Japanese version Screech allowed that men might have purchased shunga and *shunpon* at Tsutaya’s print shop on their way home in the morning from a night at Yoshiwara (p. 36).

9. Paul Schalow makes a similar critique of a substitutional model in his review of Gary Leupp’s *Male Colors*, *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 23 (1997), pp. 196–201.

10. See Tanaka, *Harigata*, pp. 18–19.

11. Nakano Eizō lists thirty-four such terms in his “Higa to Ehon ni tsuite,” in Fujisawa, *Nihon Sei Fūzokushi*, p. 492.

12. See Nakano, “Higa to Ehon ni tsuite,” pp. 488–90. Nakano considers that *warai* was also employed in the sense of “unusual” (*okashii*).

13. See the term *baishō* in Morohashi Tetsuji et al., *Kokanwa Jiten*, 4 vols. (Tokyo: Daishūkan Shoten, 1982), vol. 1, under character 2934.

14. Examples of absurd humor include the size disparity in Utamaro’s “Hobashira maru” (ca. 1802, see Hayakawa, *Ukiyo-e Shunga to Nanshoku*, pl. 68); the scene in Hokusai’s 1814 *Kinoe no Komatsu* where a woman inscribes her partner’s erection with a writing brush (Udō, ed., *Edo Meisaku Ehon* 5, first *kan*, fourth illustration); and Utagawa Kuniyoshi’s (1797–1861) sexual parody of a *nehan* scene in his 1831 *Ōeyama* (Fukuda, *Ukiyo-e Giga*, pl. 112). An extensive collection of *senryū* related to Yoshiwara is provided by Hanasaki Kazuo’s *Senryū Edo Yoshiwara Zue*.

15. Tanaka Yūko and Sumie Jones make a similar critique of Screech’s position as presented in the Japanese version of his book; they stress the fundamental importance of humor and parody to the *shunga* genre in Ueno et al., “(Zadankai) Shunpon • Shunga no Kenkyū no Rinkai,” pp. 118–19.

16. For instance see the named *yūjo* in Chōbunsai Eishi’s (1756–1829) *Seirō Bijin Rokkasen* (*Six Flower Immortals Among the Yoshiwara’s Beauties*, ca. 1795–1796), some of whom figure in the contemporary *Yoshiwara Saiken* guides; see Narazaki, ed., *Hizō Ukiyo-e Taikan*, vol. 7, pl. 75 and commentary on p. 234. Examples by Utamaro and other artists are plentiful. The longest-running series, over 140 prints (dating 1775–1781), was *Hinagata Wakana Hatsumoyō*, initiated by Isoda Koryūsai (act. ca. 1764–1788) and continued by Torii Kiyonaga (1752–1815) and Katsukawa Shunzan (act. ca. 1782–1798). This series, which clearly named the depicted figures, likely owed its ongoing pop-

ularity to the advertising nature of these handbill-like prints. The New Year’s finery in which the noted *yūjo* are shown lends the images a “fashion plate” quality that has eclipsed awareness of their advertising import. See the Koryūsai examples in Narazaki, ed., *Hizō Ukiyo-e Taikan*, vol. 6, pls. 78–84 and commentary on pp. 239–41. *Kagama* refers to males who enact female gender roles in the social environment of the Kabuki theaters.

17. Hanasaki Kazuo describes in detail several dozen locations in Yoshiwara containing sex businesses that catered to a wide range of income levels; see his *Edo Baishoku Hyakusugata*, passim. The third chapter of Aketa Tetsuo’s *Nihon Kagai-shi* similarly details the many locations throughout Kyoto where sex workers of many ranks operated during the *kinsei* period.

18. Seigle, *Yoshiwara: The Glittering World of the Japanese Courtesan*, p. 153.

19. Examples include an image from Utagawa Kuniyoshi’s (1797–1861) 1831 *Ōeyama* of a man being shown *shunpon* and an erotic handscroll by a variety of *yūjo* who are attempting to reinvigorate his desire while the man reclines on a *sumidan* altar surrounded by copulating animals in a parody of a *nehan* scene (Fukuda, *Ukiyo-e Giga*, pl. 112). Utagawa Kunitora’s *Zoku: Iro no Hakidame* (ca. 1830–1843) offers a scene of a man opening a volume of a *shunpon* set while engaged in intercourse with a *yūjo* as he explains that his orgasm has a special (*kakubetsu*) quality if it occurs while he is viewing *shunga* (Fukuda, *Ōedo: Ukiyo-e no Haru*, pl. 15).

20. The location of his shop, which handled the works of Utamaro and Sharaku among others, is found in maps of the area; see the illustration from the 1783 *Yoshiwara Saiken* in Takahashi Yōji, ed., *Tsutaya Jūzaburō no Shigoto*, p. 11. Screech notes the shop location in the Japanese version of his text, p. 36.

21. Although most discussions assume a dual gender system, a multi-gender system has been proposed for some cultures. Serena Nanda has proposed the notion of additional gender categories in *Neither Men nor Women: The Hijras of India*. Judith Butler suggests that “gender is a kind of action that can potentially proliferate beyond the binary limits imposed by the apparent binary of sex” (*Gender Trouble*, p. 112).

22. *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. XL VII, pp. 347–68.

23. See, for example, the section on “Anatomical Difference,” pp. 94–100.

24. Instances include pp. 84–86 and 94–95.

25. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 140.

26. *Kagama*, although nominally young “apprentice actors” standing in the shadows of the Kabuki theatre waiting for a chance to appear on stage, were largely employed for professional sexual encounters by special teahouses called *kagemajaya*. See Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*, pp. 119–20. Screech employs this term in his Japanese version (p. 208), but not in the English.

27. According to Nakano Eizō, *kagama* in the Kansai area dressed as women to entertain female customers and as *wakashū* to entertain male customers; see Fujisawa, ed., *Nihon Sei Fūzokushi*, p. 592. Nishiyama Matsunosuke cites a passage from Hiraga Gennai’s *Fūryū Shidōken Den* plus various *senryū* verses as evidence for the employment of *kagama* by female customers; see Fujisawa, ed., *Nihon Sei Fūzokushi*, p. 444.

28. Narazaki, *Hizō Ukiyo-e Taikan*, vol. 4, pl. 122.

29. See the references to *kagama onna* in Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*, p. 119, n. 57.

30. Although the motives for this interest may have been quite different during the Edo period, in contemporary Japan *manga* oriented toward young female readers frequently portray male figures with female gender markers, showing how widespread such an interest can become.

31. Screech discusses this print on pp. 132–34 and 210.

32. Naitō’s comments can be found on p. 147 of *Harunobu*, vol. 1 of *Nihon Aato Sentaa*, ed., *Meihin Senbutsu Ukiyo-e*. This volume’s full-size color reproduction of the print (plate 85) reveals that the *obi* is different in color and fabric pattern from the blanket that covers his legs.

33. The difficult task of determining the historical origins of this term in Japan and the possible changes in meaning over time is not attempted. The problems, including Chinese usage and the way this term was used interchangeably with a large number of equivalent words, are such that a thorough investigation might become a book in itself.

34. Fukuda, ed., *Niku hitsu Fūzoku Emaki*, p. 136; Hayashi and Lane, eds., *Koshibagaki Sōshi*, figs. 10–12; and Fujisawa, ed., *Nihon Sei Fūzokushi*, p. 51. Sections of a late Edo-period copy are found in Fukuda, ed., *Niku hitsu Fūzoku Emaki*, pls. 109–12.

35. Examples of *Toba-e* handscrolls from the last several centuries are illustrated in Fukuda, ed., *Niku hitsu Fūzoku Emaki*, pp. 136–60, and in Fukuda's *Ukiyo-e Giga*, pp. 6–47.

36. Hayashi and Lane, eds., *Koshibagaki Sōshi*, figs. 21–23 and p. 20. Other early traditions of handscrolls with sexual themes are discussed in the same volume, pp. 17–21.

37. Illustrations of this early version are few; see fig. 15 in Hayashi and Lane, eds., *Koshibagaki Sōshi*, and Fujisawa, ed., *Nihon Sei Fūzokushi*, p. 57.

38. See the 1828 version in Hayashi and Lane, eds., *Koshibagaki Sōshi*, passim. Although Lane attributes this version to an unidentified Sumiyoshi-school painter (ibid., p. 52), the *kaō* signature clearly reads Bun'yō, the signature of Tozaka Bun'yō (1783–1852), an Edo artist skilled in Yamato-e style painting. Bun'yō studied with Tani Bunchō (1763–1840), which accords with the Bunchō-style calligraphy in the characters for the date.

39. Fukuda, *Fūzoku Ehon Ukiyo-e*, pl. 36.

40. Fukuda, *Ehon Ukiyo-e Sen*, pl. 186.

41. Fukuda, *Enshoku Ukiyo-e no Onna*, pl. 78.

42. Fukuda, *Fūzoku Ehon Ukiyo-e*, pls. 147–48.

43. This print from Utamarō's noted *Uta Makura* album is much reproduced, including Richard Lane, *Edo no Haru: Ithōjin Mankai*, pp. 14–15.

44. The complexity of interpretation generated by similar, often even more extreme, mixtures of sex and violence in contemporary Japanese *manga* (comics) reveals how difficult this meaningful and important topic can be. See chapter three, "Cartooning Erotics: Japanese *Ero Manga*," in Anne Allison, *Permitted & Prohibited Desires*. Both Hockley and Schalow question the accuracy of Screech's discussion of violence in shunga in their reviews of his work.

45. Surviving drawings from which the woodblocks were carved reveal that sometimes the artists completed the primary outlines and left fabric designs up to the carvers.

46. In most of the large numbers of Song-period Buddhist portrait paintings that were imported into Japan, fabric patterns carefully followed the folds of the drapery (see the Southern Song *Portrait of Tiantai Dashi* by Zhang Sixun in Yonezawa and Nakata, *Shōrai Bijutsu*, pl. 81). Japanese artists either followed that example in works such as the 1221 *Portrait of Go-Toba Tennō* (Kameda Tsutomu et al., *Men to Shōzō*, pl. 41), or ignored it by maintaining the fabric pattern unbroken across the drapery folds, as in the 1334 *Portrait of Daijō Kokushi* (ibid., pl. 57). The casual alternation of these approaches continued through the Edo period; the plaid-like pattern on the far-right woman in the seventeenth-century painting *Yuna* is a striking example of an unmodulated fabric design on a figure (Yamane Yūzō et al., *Fūzokuga to Ukiyoeshi*, pl. 14). Many works by Harunobu and Utamarō show masterful conformation of fabric patterns to folds. On the other hand, Isoda Koryūsai's *Shikidō Tokkumi Jūni-tsugui* (ca. 1777) shows a nearly consistent application of "flat" patterns over folds (Hayashi and Lane, ed., *Isoda Koryūsai's Shikidō Tokkumi Jūni-tsugui*, passim). Finally, some of the many images in Katsushika Hokusai's 1814 *Kinō no Komatsu* move unpredictably from modulated to unmodulated fabric patterns (Udō, ed., *Edo Meisaku Ehon*, vol. 5, passim).

47. Fukuda, *Edo no Seiaigaku*, ill. 2.

48. See Takahashi Seiichirō's discussion of the minimal remuneration of Edo-period Ukiyo-e artists in his *Traditional Woodblock Prints of Japan*,

pp. 19–23. The poverty of Hokusai and Hiroshige, notwithstanding their tremendous output, is highlighted by Takahashi.

49. See the tattooing image that is the third print in Yoshitoshi's *Fūzoku Sanjūnisō* in Stevenson, *Yoshitoshi's Women*, p. 32.

50. See the introduction and the first chapter of Gregory Pflugfelder's *Cartographies of Desire*.

51. Kempadoo and Doezema, eds., *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*, p. 3.

52. Bindman, "An International Perspective on Slavery in the Sex Industry," in ibid., pp. 65–66.

53. The architectural splendor of the Sumiya of the Shimabara in Kyoto and the Kagetsu of the Maruyama area in Nagasaki, like the finest of the surviving kimonos and hair ornaments, equal or surpass the most extravagant settings in the Ukiyo-e treatment of interiors of the licensed quarters.

54. Screech, *Shunga*, p. 4, taken from quotation found in Joan DeJean, "The Politics of Pornography," in *The Invention of Pornography*, ed. Lynn Hunt, p. 110. Screech repeatedly refers to the same quotation in *Sex and the Floating World*, pp. 37, 39, 88.

55. Among numerous examples are: a solitary woman in bed looking at a *shunpon* in Utagawa Kunisada's (1786–1864) *Shunshoku Neya no Koto* (1847) (Fukuda, ed. *Nihon no Seikimatsu*, p. 58); a couple having intercourse in a position similar to that seen in an open *shunpon* on their bed, from Kitagawa Tsukimaro's twelve-print set *Azuma Otoko ni Kyō Jorō* (ca. 1804–1817) in Fukuda, *Ukiyo-e: Edo no Shiki*, pl. 84; and a couple looking at a *shunpon* while discussing Santō Kyōden in Kikugawa Eizan's (1787–1867) *Nise Monogatari* (ca. 1804–1817) in Fukuda, *Fūzoku Ehon Ukiyo-e*, pl. 188. Also see n. 16 above.

56. Seigle, *Yoshiwara*, p. 156.

57. Tanaka, *Harigata*, passim.

58. Studies that develop various new viewpoints toward sexually explicit materials in the West include Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'*; Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America*; and Juffer, *At Home with Pornography: Women, Sex, and Everyday Life*.

59. See esp. Ueno et al., "(Zadankai) Shunpon • Shunga no Kenkyū no Rinkai," pp. 130–32, for discussion of the topic of female viewpoint.

60. Tanaka, *Harigata*, pp. 17–18, 84.

61. Ueno et al., "(Zadankai) Shunpon • Shunga no Kenkyū no Rinkai," passim. Their position has been criticized for an overly idealized view of Edo-period culture by Koyano Atsushi in his *Edo Gensō Hihan*, pp. 34–68, but the intemperance of Koyano's exaggerated comments effectively undercuts his own critique.

62. *Bungaku*, vol. 10 (1999) published a discussion of *shunga* by male scholars, who mention with laughter a university class that excluded female students during an examination of shunga; see Hanasaki Kazuo et al., "Shunga Bunka," *Bungaku*, vol. 10 (no. 3) (1999), p. 10. Comparison of this male panel discussion with the female discussion in Ueno et al. is quite illuminating for the differences in the topics and tone of the comments.

63. *Edo no Kiriguchi*, 1994. A recent computer search at Maruzen bookstore revealed an astounding seventy-one publications that he has written, co-authored, translated, or edited. The importance of Takayama's contribution is discussed by Ueno Chizuko and Sumie Jones in Ueno Chizuko et al., "(Zadankai) Shunpon • Shunga no Kenkyū no Rinkai," p. 120.

64. Later called a "rock' bamboo" (p. 154).

65. See his *Ukiyo-e Shunga to Nanshoku* and *The Shunga of Suzuki Harunobu: Mitate-e and Sexuality in Edo*.

66. See Kumon Kodomo Kenkyūjo, ed., *Ukiyo-e ni Miru Edo no Kodomotachi* and their *Ukiyo-e no Kodomotachi: Kikoku Ten Zuroku*. In addition, see the print section in the Tokyo National Museum catalogue of 2001, *Bijutsu no Naka no Kodomotachi*.

67. See <http://www.arc.ritsumei.ac.jp/theater/biiti/>

68. Alan Hockley's review of Screech's work presents some of these arguments.